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VANGUARD

Nigeria: Collapsed Building - Death Toll Rises to 12

Evelyn Usman, Olasunkanmi Akoni & Ifeanyin Okolie

26 March 2009

Lagos — DEATH toll in the collapsed four-storey building on Oderinde Street, Idi-Araba, Lagos has risen to 12. Nine more bodies were recovered yesterday from the rubble, three of them children of same parents.

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However, an eight-month old baby, Divine Emmanuel, was rescued, twelve hours after the collapse. His mother, Mrs Loveth Emmanuel, was found dead under the rubble.

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In reaction, the Lagos State government said the site of the building has been automatically acquired according to the provisions of a subsisting law. State Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr. Opeyemi Bamidele, disclosed this yesterday while reacting to the incident.

Among the injured, though still unconscious in hospital, is the owner of the building identified simply as Alhaja. One of the survivors identified as Ego could not be consoled as he sobbed uncontrollably over the loss of his three children. The children were said to be among those making desperate calls for help until 3a.m. yesterday.

Although the exact number of those still trapped is still uncertain, excavation work was almost at its final lap yesterday evening.

Chairman of Mushin Local Government, Mr Babatunde Adepitan who was also at the scene said those rescued were responding to treatment in the hospital. He said the local government was collaborating with the state government to provide accommodation for the surviving victims.

The Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Frank Mba who was also present at the scene, confirmed the death toll, saying investigation would commence at the end of the rescue mission.

Vanguard gathered at the scene that there had been indications of a possible collapse of the building following some vibrations. However, the tenants claimed that several complaints to the owner of the building yielded no positive result, until the unexpected happened on Tuesday evening..

7 houses marked for demolition

Attributing the cause of the collapse to the use of substandard materials during construction, the Commissioner for Physical

Planning and Urban Development, Mr. Francisco Abosede who was at the scene, said henceforth, the local government chairmen would inspect all buildings within their areas and mark any suspected to be built with substandard materials for demolition. This, the commissioner explained, was to forestall a recurrence.

In line with the directive, seven houses in the area said to be on the verge of collapse have been marked for immediate demolition. They include houses on numbers 36 Agero Road, 67 Okunfade Street, 30 Mosalashi Street, 53 Ogungbayeni Street, 17 Takuro Street, 24 Olafade Street and 13 Ogugbayeni Street.

Site of building acquired by govt

On the acquisition of the site of the collapsed building, it would be recalled that

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the state government had earlier called on property owners in the state whose property are structurally defective to submit such to the state government for acquisition with adequate compensation paid.

The State Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr. Opeyemi Bamidele, stated this yesterday while reacting to the unfortunate incident saying the acquisition of the collapsed building by the state government is empowered under the state law adding that government has sent experts to the site to commence a probe in order to find the immediate and remote cause(s) of the collapsed building.

His words: "We have not only done it to individuals but also to the Federal Government that owns the Bank of Industry Building and if we have gone that far to implement the law, we wouldn't have any reason to bend the rules or shy away from implementing the same law that applies to other people."

He blamed the occurrence on the neglect by past leaders who failed to place priorities on the development of infrastructural facilities as well as implementation of the regulations.

"The laws have always been there but because there was no enforcement all such structures were put in place," Bamidele stressed.

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