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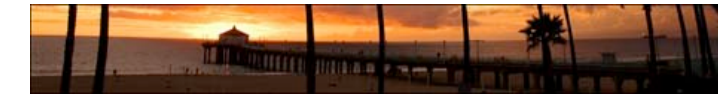
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VANGUARD

Nigeria: How a Trailer Sent Seven to Early Graves

Vincent Ujumadu

21 May 2010

OPINION

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Awka — IT was a horrifying night on Monday in Awka, the Anambra State capital when seven persons, including a three-month-old baby were crushed to death by a trailer carrying a 40-foot container and heading to the commercial town of Onitsha .

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The three-month-old baby was dedicated in a Church only a day earlier and members of its family had visited a friend and were driving back home when they met their untimely death. Another victim was a mobile police officer who was among those working at a check-point at the scene of the accident at the time. He too was killed instantly along with the driver of the trailer.

The trailer, a DAF truck, with registration number XN 754 LSR was descending the hilly Enugu-Onitsha expressway at the busy Unizik flyover junction when its breaks allegedly failed. In front of the driver was a long queue of other vehicles waiting to be cleared by a team of mobile policemen at the check point mounted in the area.

Anambra State Deputy Governor with the State Commissioner for Works, Arc. Callistus Ilozumba at the scene of the accident

And having lost control, the trailer rammed into the vehicles, leading to a chain of accident involving many vehicles. Three other vehicles, including a Toyota Hilux van with registration number AN 33 A 03 belonging to the state Ministry of Works, a Peugeot 504 salon car with registration number ANSG 43 and Nissan Sunny car with registration number BB 589 APP, were completely destroyed.

In fact, a day earlier, another accident had happened on the same spot which also claimed a life and the cause was also traced to the police check point mounted in the area. That was why residents of that part of the state capital spontaneously tried to mob the police when the Monday accident happened as they argued that it was not the right place to mount a road block in view of the steep nature of the area.

Besides, they argued that since only one side of the expressway is presently being used because of the on-going rehabilitation taking place on the other side, there was no need to cause further obstruction in the area.

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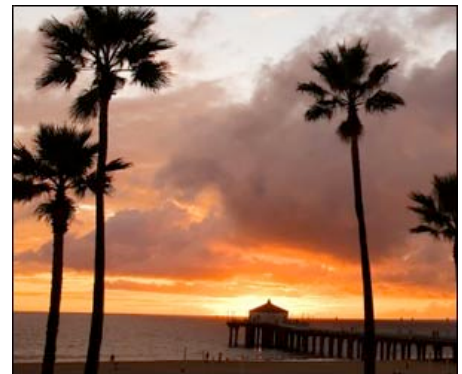
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Angered by the number of lives lost when the accident took place, sympathisers dismantled the drums used by the police to block part of the expressway, an action that prompted the police men to take to their heels. The Divisional Police Officer

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(DPO) for Awka Central Police Station, Mr. Owan Ketung and his colleague from the B Division, Mr. Temitope Fasugba, who rushed to the scene to assess the situation were almost mobbed by the sympathisers and they had to quietly leave the scene to brief their commissioner. The protesters also marched to the police headquarters, demanding the immediate dismantling of all check-points in the heart of the city, arguing that the police men use them only for collecting money from motorists.

The state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Philemon Leha, who reacted on the accident sympathised with the people, but argued that the Police should not be blamed for the accident because their presence was for the good of the state.

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According to him, the increased number of check-points in the city was to check the activities of armed robbers and kidnappers, adding that if the check-points were dismantled, "the kidnappers can even come and carry me from this place". According to him, the people of the state should appreciate the fact that armed robbery and kidnapping incidents had reduced considerably since the black spots in the state were identified and policed.

For the greater period on Tuesday, movement in the area was difficult as drivers and sympathisers stopped to take a look at the scene with the mangled bodies of the victims and damaged vehicles.

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