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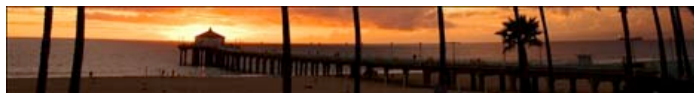
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VANGUARD

Nigeria: Pandemonium as Two Die From Poisonous Gas in Kaduna

Emeka Mamah

30 May 2010

Kaduna — There was pandemonium in Kaduna yesterday when a welder opened a gas cylinder containing suspected poisonous gas which reportedly choked two people to death and left over 500 unconscious as they were rushed to hospitals in Kakuri area of the metropolis.

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It was alleged that some people had stolen the big cylinder from one of the textile firms which closed shop in the area about eight years ago to cut and sell as scraps to welders without realizing that it contained poisonous materials. The incident occurred along the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) road at about 4 pm.

The gas emission which was said to have spread like wild fire reported left hundreds of people unconscious, thus causing some stampede in several homes, motor parks and churches.

A resident, and Leader, Men's Fellowship at St Paul's Anglican Church, Kakuri, Mr. Chris Alugwe told Sunday Vanguard that a member of the church was among those that fainted. The church is about 2000 metres away from the the DICON road wher the cylinder was reportedly opened.

According to Alugwe "the incident happened between 3.30 pm and 4.10pm. We were in the church when we noticed that some people were running helter- skelter while others were just falling down and foaming from their mouths, unconscious.

"Soon, some of our members started gasping for breath after inhaling the poisonous gas. The emission was later traced to the DICON Road area where a cylinder was said to have been opened in a welder's workshop.

"The whole of the area was immediately thrown into confusion amid the ensuing commotion as everybody struggled to rush those affected to hospitals and also run for his/her dear life.

"Most of the victims were rushed to the Saint Gerald's Catholic Hospital, Kakuri; the Gwamna Awan Hospital, Nasarawa and Maneks Hospital, Kakuri.

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At the Maneks Hospital, Sunday Vanguard was informed that the workers were initially rejecting the victims until the owner returned from where he had gone to and directed them to accept those being brought for medical attention."

The wards of most hospitals where the victims were rushed to were said to be overflowing with patients affected by the poisonous emission at the time of this report.

The doctor on duty at Saint Gerald Catholic Hospital, Dr. Elonuchukwu Charles told newsmen that pregnant women were affected most by the emission as many of them were still unconscious, expressing fears that poisonous gas

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many of them were still unconscious, expressing fears that poisonous gas inhaled by this category of the victims could cause them to have stillbirths.

According to him, other victims were still complaining of serious stomach pains and were being kept under watch in the hospital. "There was a gas emission and a lot of people inhaled it and we don't know the nature of the gas yet. "But being a poisonous gas, it almost suffocated people. We had a lot of people here, they were approximately a hundred people.

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"They were gasping for breath and most of them we had to do some palliative treatment. We had to send them outside after treatment to get some fresh air. "Naturally when they ventilate very well the gas will disappear gradually from their system.

"A lot of them actually got well here and they left, but some of them who could not get well; we have to do something further in order to stabilize them and some of them are even still here.

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"So we do not even know whether the gas is even a teratogenic kind of gas, that is; the gas that can cause the baby in the womb to have problem. "It can either kill the baby or harm it. So, we still have

a lot of the victims that are pregnant women with us here because they are still having some stomach pain and dizziness.

"Some of them are even unconscious, like this woman here. They are just too many; It is so overwhelming and we can't see all of them at the same time. There are no deaths yet," he stressed, even as many residents of the area were seen going about in face masks while others used handkerchiefs and other pieces of clothes to cover their noses.

Armed soldiers and anti-riot policemen from the state anti-crime outfit, Operation Yaki have however cordoned off the scene of the gas emission.

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