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## 30 feared dead in Calabar Free Trade Zone inferno

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By Ike Uchechukwu

**CALABAR**—EYEWITNESSES have said about 30 persons died when an inferno from an explosion razed part of the Calabar Free Trade Zone, CFTZ, in the early hours of yesterday.

However, Police have said nine persons died in the incident, with others sustaining various degrees of burns. They added that the cause of the explosion was yet unknown.

The CFTZ in Esuk Utan community is host to several tank farms belonging to different companies, but yesterday's fire incident reportedly emanated from LINC

Oil and Gas' tank farm as a result of what was termed negligence and sabotage by some of its staff.

An eyewitness, Mr. Ikenga Uti, disclosed that a worker, who was trying to siphon petrol from a vessel opened one of the valves, but unfortunately the gasket on the valve failed. So the pressure threw him off, with fuel flowing into the gutter.



Remains of containers used for scooping by the victims near one of the gutters.

He said people started scooping it with various containers—drums, plastic and steel buckets.

### **The fire**

According to Uti, “it was during the scooping of fuel from the gutter that the fire started and flowed back to LINC Oil and Gas and to Nigeria Ports Authority, NPA, where it entered a vessel loaded with PMS.

“As I speak with you, we have brought out eight bodies from LINC Oil and Gas and about six people, who were scooping fuel outside the gate, also died.”



Wife of one of the victim being consoled.

Another eyewitness revealed that “the people scooping fuel said that the fire was ignited by somebody who was smoking cigarette close to one of the gutters that the product was flowing through, while some said it was a spark from one of the stainless steel buckets.

“For now, I can tell you that the Safety Manager and some security personnel from the company are dead. This tragedy was caused because someone got greedy; the person, who opened that valve, caused this fire because they wanted to steal petrol.”

He added that the host community, Esuk Utan, was not spared as the fuel from the gutter flowed into the community.

He added, “due to the strong fumes of the petrol, some members of the community woke up to realise that petrol was flowing through their gutters and

decided to scoop the product.”

## **7 die in fish village**

A fishing settlement on the waterfront nearby was not spared. The settlement, which also serves as a fish market, was razed and seven people, who lived there, lost their lives also, according to eyewitnesses.

Several wooden canoes and engine boats were caught in the inferno.



## **‘We were discharging old product’**

Meanwhile, a staff of the depot, who spoke under the condition of anonymity, said the fire outbreak occurred when staff of the depot were discharging old products from the tanks to create space for new consignment.

According to the staff, “as we speak right now, the vessel that brought in our new product is just by the port here. Some of our staff were discharging the old product from the tank with a view to bringing in the new one when the fire outbreak occurred.”

## **‘30 died’**

A staff of one of the oil and gas company, who pleaded anonymity, said: “Almost 30 people have been confirmed dead. So many have severe injuries and have been rushed to the hospital.

“I saw someone whose entire legs melted in the fire. It was only his bones that were sticking out. I do not know if he will survive. It was very horrible. There was fire everywhere.

“Nobody knew where they could run to. Many other companies in this vicinity and even inside the NPA have had one equipment or the other affected by the

fire.

“The truth is that they were performing illegal business there that is why there were no safety measures in place, making the situation get out of hand. If it was a normal operation, I believe it could have been contained easily. They have been doing this for long, but today was bad luck for them.

“However, it is just fortunate that the tank farms themselves did not blow up, thanks to the sophisticated fire fighting equipment they have. Otherwise, the impact would have been like that of an atomic bomb.”



## **Police**

When contacted, Cross River State’s Commissioner of Police, Mr. Hafiz Inuwa, however, said nine people died in the incident.

Mr. Inuwa added that several other persons, who sustained injuries, were currently being treated in one of the hospitals in Calabar.

According to him, the manager of the depot is yet to brief the Police on what led to the explosion.

He said: “Nobody has come out to tell us that this is what caused the fire outbreak. We have gone round, we have done what we can, but investigation will later reveal what actually led to the explosion.

“For now, nine people are confirmed dead and many others, who sustained burns, are currently receiving treatment in one of the hospitals around town.”

Officials of Cross State Emergency Management Agency, SEMA, were on ground to assess the extent of damages caused by the explosion.



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**Pastor Taiwo** • 10 hours ago

Why have there been many tragedies coming down on Calabar lately? The other time it was a structural failure which took many souls away with it.  
May the Lord have mercy on the people of Calabar.

Luke 13:1-5 says, "There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

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The above quoted biblical passage tells us that some people asked Jesus, "What about the people Pilate slaughtered and the innocent people who were killed by the falling of the Tower? Or where was God in these events? Or why did God allow innocent people to suffer?" Notice that when Jesus responded, He did not say, "I am very sorry to hear about this tragedy, this things happen, and there is nothing we can do about it" Neither did He say, "It is fate. As good Christians you have to accept good with bad."

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**forestgee** ➔ Pastor Taiwo • 4 hours ago

...from one crisis to another! Even London is also having the same problems. We brought a 'dark' star upon ourselves.

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**ukoette ibekwe** • 7 hours ago

Discharging old products. What do they mean by old products. So tank farms have petroleum products to waste yet the people are buying at exorbitant prices. And is it an appropriate way to just discard petroleum products into the environment. A society where the only standard is how much money you can steal and how many people you can kill.

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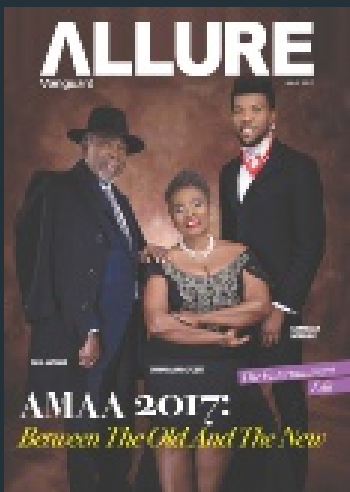
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204

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121

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195

BIAFRA: THE WAR RAGES ON BY OTHER MEANS

49

QUIT NOTICE: AREWA YOUTHS, OHANAEZE NDIGBO PARLEY IN ABUJA

393

PRESIDENCY SEEKS SUPREME COURT'S INTERPRETATION ON MAGU, SECTION 171

34

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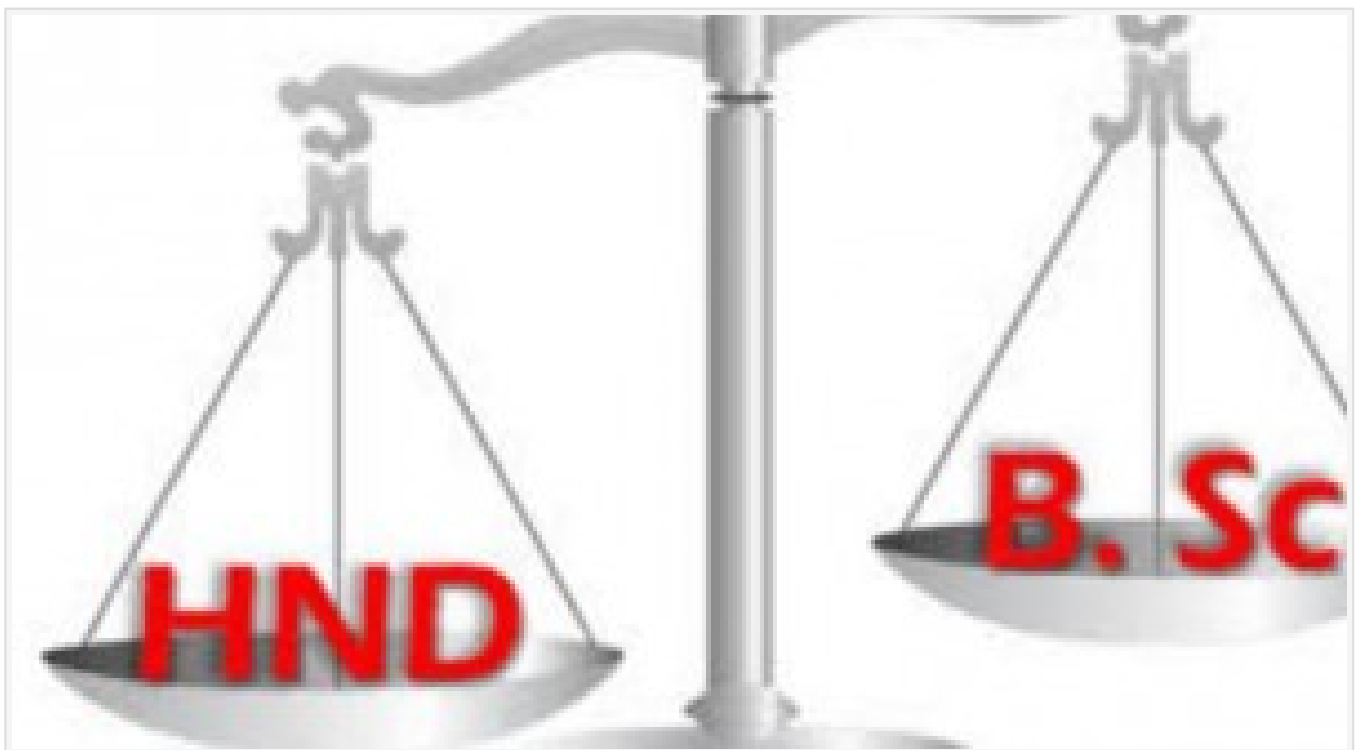
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