

Lagos explosion: Death toll rises to 20

ON MARCH 17, 2020 12:42 AMIN **NEWS**

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By Olasunkanmi Akoni, Johnbosco Agbakwuru,
Sam Eyoboka, Bose Adelaja & Esther
Onyegbula

THE death toll in last Sunday's explosion, at Ado Soba, in Abule-Ado Amuwo Odofin Local Government Area of Lagos State, has risen to 20 from the earlier recorded 15, as five more bodies were recovered, yesterday, from the rubble at the scene.

Lagos residents, yesterday, turned the site into a kind of tourist centre as they trooped out in their thousands, wailing and lamenting the level of devastation.

The carcasses of collapsed buildings and wrecked vehicles littered the entire area as armed security personnel cordoned off the scene.

Toddler rescued from collapse building

But a toddler, simply identified as Favour, was rescued alive from the rubbles of one of the collapsed buildings at the explosion site.

The three-year-old baby girl was rescued from the rubbles on Sunday night by Red Cross officials at the scene.

Chairman of the Red Cross in Nigeria, Adebowale Kolawole, said: "We recovered her naked under the debris of a building. Later, we found that the mother and her sibling were admitted in the hospital. The mother, who sustained a head injury, was in a semi unconscious state. This morning (Monday) when she asked for her daughter, the doctors told her that her daughter was safe and was with the Red Cross. As soon as possible, we are taking her to go see her mother at the naval hospital. She is Favour and God has favoured her."

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Couple dies from explosion

Vanguard, however, gathered that the identity of the pregnant woman, who lost her life alongside others, has been revealed.

She was Chisom Udoakonobi.

It was gathered that the late Chisom died alongside her husband, Mr. Udoakonobi.

Vanguard also gathered that the couple was the only children of their parents.

Residents recount ordeal

Also recounting his ordeal, President of AMSPON, Mr. Yaya Babatunde, said: "I was in my Church in Ajegunle when I heard the explosive sound that shook my Church as well. After the first service, I rushed to my house in Satellite Town to be sure my house was safe. Thereafter, I proceeded to Abule Ado to check on some of my members living in that area to be sure they were safe too, only to find that they were affected."

Truck driver not dead

It was gathered that the driver, who reportedly drove the truck laden with granites that caused the explosion, is on the run, contrary to insinuation that he could have been burnt in the resultant inferno.

As at yesterday, there were moves to ascertain the plate number of the burnt truck.

Vanguard reliably gathered that the burnt number plate would be taken for analysis to ascertain its owner and by extension, arrest the fleeing driver.

How incident happened —NEMA

But the acting Coordinator, Lagos Territorial Office, National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, Mr. Ibrahim Farinloye, said the pressure exerted on the pipeline by the tipper laden with granite, caused the explosion.

Farinloye stated that three survivors were rescued on Monday, adding that three more bodies, all females, were recovered, while emergency workers were excavating some of the collapsed buildings.

The NEMA boss said: "When the pressure became too much, the pipeline forced itself out to escape and that was why the sky was filled with grey smoke that led to explosion before the fire."

Lagos govt sets-up N2b relief fund

However, following collateral damage caused by the unfortunate explosion, Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State has set up a N2 billion emergency relief fund to alleviate losses suffered by victims.

Sanwo-Olu also announced the donation of N250 million, as capital base for the relief fund.

The governor, accompanied by his deputy, Dr. Obafemi Hamzat, stated this when he led a high powered delegation to the scene for an on-the-spot assessment.

He said: "I spent some time at the site of the tragic incident at Abule Ado. To give immediate relief and support to the victims of the disaster, I have set up a N2 billion relief fund to be chaired by Dr. Obafemi Hamzat. The state government has put N250 million into the fund immediately.

"This incident is certainly beyond what the government can independently pull off and we will count on your support to contribute to this fund as we work to provide succour for the victims of this unfortunate incident. I appeal to everyone to be a part of helping to provide this much-needed relief."

Sanwo-Olu, who described the incident as unprecedented, said: "I have never seen this level of devastation before in the state. It is like a war-torn zone."

Sanwo-Olu briefs Buhari on explosion

Similarly, Governor Sanwo-Olu, yesterday, briefed President Muhammadu Buhari on the unfortunate Abule-Ado explosion.

The Governor's meeting with President Buhari was at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Speaking with State House correspondents, Sanwo-Olu said: "I had very rare opportunity to brief Mr. President about the very unfortunate gas/pipeline explosion in Lagos State yesterday.

"Mr. President was very gracious to receive me and asked about where we are and what had happened. I was able to show him pictorially the extent and the level of destruction of what happened, yesterday (Sunday). It is a very unfortunate incident; it is not something that anyone could have imagined, you needed to be there to see the level of destruction."

NNPC Right of Way intact —Kyari

Meanwhile, contrary to widespread speculations, Group Managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, NNPC, Mele Kyari, has confirmed that the explosion was caused by gas cylinder leakages that ignited the wild-spread fire.

Kyari, during an on-the-spot assessment, said the fire was exacerbated by buildings and factories by gas vendors who built on NNPC pipelines Right of Way, ROW.

He said:" I arrived Lagos to make an on-the-spot assessment of the explosion that ignited the NNPC product pipeline fire. The explosions caused by a spark that ignited fire from the extensively charged atmosphere emanated from gas cylinder leakages.

"The NNPC pipeline ROW encroachment by gas handling vendors and construction of houses enabled the explosion and aggravated the impact. We are working with Lagos State government and security agencies to clear the ROW."

None of our students died—Bethlehem school

Meanwhile, the management of Bethlehem International Catholic School, Abule Ado, yesterday, stated that none of the students died in the explosion that claimed several lives on Sunday morning.

Speaking with Vanguard at the scene, the Director for Education for Catholic Arch Diocese of Lagos State, Monsior Jerome Oduntan, said no student died during the explosion.

Monsior Oduntan said: "We have a population of 268 students, because of the stampede, 50 of them sustained injuries, we took them to the hospital and they were treated and discharged and all the students are at home with their parents. But we still have two students that are undergoing treatment at the naval hospital and one at the Lagos State Teaching Hospital, LASUTH.

"Three students are undergoing treatment at the moment. Not even a single student died. And no student is missing.

"However, I am still gathering information on the number of staff yet to be accounted for, so I won't be able to tell you how many we are looking for."

"We have about 80 staff, including teaching and non-teaching staff. I can only confirm two staff that died yesterday, (Sunday), the administrator, that is the principal and a female security officer. Those are the ones I can confirm for now.

"At the moment, we are looking for four staff, who are still missing. We lost two staff, who are in the mortuary because it was on Sunday we had domestic staff who were on duty", he said.

Catholic Church confirms death of Alokha

Also, the Catholic Archbishop of Lagos Archdiocese, Most Rev. Alfred Martins, yesterday, confirmed the death of the school's Administrator, Rev. Henrietta Alokha, in Sunday's explosion.

Martins said: "On Sunday 15th March 2020, there was a massive explosion at the Abule Ado area of Lagos which led to the collapse of many structures in the area.

"We do not have an official explanation for the explosion yet. All we know is that a truck accident was involved; the Pipeline going through the community was involved as well as a stack of gas cylinders. All these together, by some series of cause and effect, are said to be the cause of the devastating explosion which very badly affected our Bethlehem Girls College, Abule Ado and many other buildings in the vicinity. This sad incident occurred while the students and staff were at Sunday Mass."

Afenifere, ERA/FoEN call for probe

Meanwhile, the pan-Yoruba socio-political organization, Afenifere and the Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria, ERA/FoEN, yesterday, called on the Federal Government to carry out a forensic investigation of the immediate and remote cause of the Abule Ado explosion.

Afenifere, in a statement by its National Publicity Secretary, Yinka Odumakin, said the group "is distressed by the Lagos explosion that killed an unspecified number of people on Sunday and destroyed yet to be enumerated property."

Odumakin said: "Our hearts go to all the families who are victims of this great tragedy as we pray for the repose of all souls who perished in the sad occurrence.

We call for an open inquiry into this incident coming three weeks after the Chief of Army staff announced the presence of Boko Haram in Lagos."

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