

NYSC 5:

Cut down in their prime

- A/Ibom laments 'black Wednesday'
- Our shining star is gone – Rev Ekanem, one of the victims' uncle

By Harris Emanuel

It was a heart wrenching moment as parents and guardians watched the remains of their children and wards draped in Nigerian flags brought out of the belly of the C-130 Air Force jet marked NAF 917, which conveyed them back to Akwa Ibom State.

Tears streaming down the cheeks and the forlorn look on their faces aptly captured their mood.

The pains and sorrows they are passing through since the tragedy occurred are gargantuan.

The accident which claimed the lives of the five graduates reportedly happened along Abaji/Kwali expressway when the driver of an 18-seater bus in which they were travelling ran into a stationary trailer in the early hours of Wednesday, July 28.

They were travelling to Katsina State where they had been posted for their National Youth Service.

Seven others sustained severe injuries and were rushed to a government hospital in the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, for treatment.

Killed were Upere Innocent Peter and Akpan Victor Joseph, both graduates of Mass Communication from Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic; as well as Asuquo Miracle Effiong, graduate of Psychology; Ekikoh Stella Sylvester, graduate of Sociology and Anthropology and Ezuruike Coleman Chikwado, graduate of History and International Studies, all of University of Uyo.

The authorities of University of Uyo and Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, drew up elaborate, but solemn programmes to mourn their departed former students.

Grief

Overwhelmed by grief, relatives of the deceased called for the restriction of the postings of future NYSC members to their geographical zones, to avoid long journeys and possible death in accidents.

Besides, they want the Federal Government to pay compensations to the bereaved families, recommending job provision for the siblings of the deceased to cushion the tragedy.

An uncle to Victor Akpan, one of the victims, Rev. Isaiah Ekanem of the Methodist Church, lamented the sad incident, saying his nephew was full of energy and had vision for a bright future.



The cleric called on government to post corps members within their geographical zones to avert tragedies.

His words: "The major challenge of the NYSC is road accident. Victor Akpan was twenty three years old.

"A prophet, peacemaker and shining star with leadership talents cut short just like that. It calls for prayers at a time like this; as children of God, we submit to God's will. It is tragic.

"The only way to overcome this challenge which NYSC has is to restrict posting of corps members to their geographical zones.

"Also, the Federal Government should arrange for their transportation to their various camps with professional drivers and speed limits.

"There should be phone number to call in case of reckless drivers because we were told the driver was the cause of the accident.

"Government should go a long way to subsidize flight fares".

On his part, Evangelist James, uncle of Stella

Sylvester Ekiko, shared the family's agony, but, in a voice laced with emotion, also appealed to the Federal Government to give succor to the bereaved families by giving automatic employment to the siblings of the deceased persons.

A sympathizer, Emem Okon, described the return of the bodies of the young graduates in an aircraft as the height of insensitivity and hypocrisy and prayed God to give the bereaved families and friends the strength to bear the loss.

"Why did they not put them in an aircraft to the camp? Now their bodies are brought back in an aircraft. Is this not medicine after death? Is this not eye service and hypocrisy of the highest order?" he said.

The Director General of the NYSC, Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim, had hurried to Uyo, Akwa Ibom State capital, as the news of the death of the young graduates spread, to commiserate with the government and people of the state.

Governor Udom Emmanuel, who received the DG, expressed sadness.

"I could feel the pains as a father because

not after you have finished sponsoring your child from primary through secondary school to university and then on his way to NYSC camp this happened", the governor said.

"It is a very sad moment and black Wednesday. Well, we can't question God when things like this happen, it's God that knows everything and He's in control of everything but our heartfelt condolences will always and ever go out to the parents and the families of those corps members.

"Our prayers will always go to these our beloved sons and daughters who have lost their lives.

"I pray may it never happen again; we pray for the families of these young sons and daughters of ours, that God will visit them and God will always be there for them because that's what will make a difference.

"No word of man, no sympathy of man can ever fill that gap."

The governor thanked the Director General of the NYSC for his prompt reaction to the incident and condolence visit to the state and families of the corps members, describing him as a good shepherd who has demonstrated love and concern over the wellbeing of the corps members.

Emmanuel vowed to clamp down on transport agencies conveying NYSC members at night to long distances, lamenting that such sad occurrence would have been avoided if the transport agency did not embark on the risky journey.

In his remarks, Ibrahim described the incident as a sad moment for the NYSC community and affected families, praying God to console Akwa Ibom State and the families who lost their children.

"It is a very sad day for us. I refer to it as black Wednesday. We commenced our Batch 'B' Stream One orientation exercise on the 27th of this month and just, yesterday, we got a call on what happened and the entire NYSC family and the people of the state are completely devastated", the NYSC boss said.

"On behalf of the NYSC management and corps members, accept our heartfelt condolences".

Speaker of the state House of Assembly, Aniekian Bassey, equally expressed sadness over the tragic incident and prayed God to grant the bereaved families the fortitude to bear the loss.

He said, "The leadership and members of the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly are deeply saddened and heartbroken by the sad incident.

"I am more pained that most of them were our constituents who had willingly offered to serve the nation.

"I pray that God Almighty will console and comfort the families, the people and government of our dear state and that of Imo State."

Also, Commissioner for Youths and Sports, Monday Uko, said it was a rude shock for him to hear about the incident, describing it as a colossal loss.

He said, "Having garnered the required knowledge and expertise in their respective areas of specialization, this regrettable occurrence has deprived the state and country of the sterling contributions those heroic but fallen youths would have brought to bear in our continuing efforts at nation building and development."

Uko, whose views were contained in statement, gave the assurance of the wholehearted support of the state government to the bereaved families, the loved ones they have left behind as well as the NYSC family "in this moment of trepidation and beyond."

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