

Abuja stampede: Crowd overwhelming, we were swept away — survivors



By Johnbosco Agbakwuru, Luminous Jannamike & John Alechenu
ABUJA – The promise of hope and goodwill that comes with Christmas was shattered in a devastating stampede at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Maitama, Abuja, over the weekend.

What was intended to be a Christmas charity event turned into a tragic loss, claiming the lives of at least 10 individuals, including four children, and injuring many more.

For the people of Mpape, Gishiri, and surrounding settlements, the event that was meant to bring relief ended in unspeakable sorrow.

Advisory

The incident in Abuja and those in Ibadan and Okija in Anambra State yesterday compelled. The federal government will issue an advisory on public events during the Yuletide season.

It also condoled with families and loved ones of those who lost their lives in the tragic stampedes that occurred during food distribution in Ibadan, Abuja and Okija in Anambra State.

This came as the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja expressed profound sorrow over the death of more than 10 people and injuries to several others during a food-sharing event organized by the St. Vincent de Paul Society at Holy Trinity Parish, Maitama, Abuja.

This is even as the Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, condemned the deadly stampedes, calling attention to the urgent systemic issues that contributed to the recurring tragedies.

Among the crowd was 45-year-old Ruth Idoko, a mother of three, who had made the early trek from Gishiri, a nearby settlement known for its struggles with poverty.

Human flood

“We woke up at 3 a.m., hoping to be among the first to get something for the children. But when the gates opened, it was like a flood, and we were all swept away. I saw my husband fall, and I couldn’t help him. I couldn’t even protect my children,” Ruth explained, her voice broken with grief.

Ruth's partner was one of the many who succumbed to the crush of the crowd. The couple had joined dozens of others from Gishiri, and surrounding areas who had gathered at the church, hoping to receive food, clothing, and other essentials.

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Survivors recount experience

Many had come from the farthest reaches of these local communities in the nation's capital, where opportunities for relief are scarce.

We came for help, lost everything

"We had no choice. The little we have is barely enough for the family. I thought we'd get something for the kids this Christmas. Instead, we lost everything," said Uduak Bassey, a father of four who had come from Mpape, a densely populated area near Maitama.

As the gates opened to allow entry, the crowd surged uncontrollably, with people desperate to reach the food being offered. The church, which had organized the charity event to help the poor, became the site of a nightmare.

Eyewitnesses recalled the horrifying scenes of people being trampled, crushed against the gates, and unable to escape the deadly crush. Many of the victims were simply trying to secure a meal to feed their families during the holiday season.

Victoria Dayo, a survivor of the stampede, who described the horror that unfolded, said: “The number of people who wanted to force the gate open were more than 3,000. Many were desperate. They forced the gate open. Those at the front fell down, and those coming from behind stepped on them. It’s a sad news, it’s a bad news. I was lucky to escape, but I can’t forget what happened,” Victoria said, her voice trembled as she recalled the chaotic scene

Similarly, Toyin Abdulatif, another eyewitness, spoke of the overwhelming scale of the crowd.

“This incident surprised me. We have never witnessed this kind of crowd. It was too much and overwhelmed the church security team. Some of the women were carrying little children. Some slept on the road in front of the church since Friday night to make sure they got the food,” she said.

The sheer desperation of the crowd was evident, and what was supposed to be a hopeful charity event became a dangerous disaster.

For some of the distraught victims, the weight of the experience left them speechless, unable to recount the horror they had witnessed.

“I can’t even explain it. I don’t have the words. I... I can’t even look at the place where it happened,” said a dazed young woman, who had been waiting with her aunt and two children when the stampede occurred. Mama Ejike, a grandmother from Gishiri who had come with her grandchildren, managed to escape the stampede but not without witnessing the horror that unfolded.

I didn’t know I’d survive

“I’ve never seen anything like it in my life. People were falling all over, screaming for help. I thought I’d never get out alive,” she said.

The incident has left many in shock, especially those from nearby communities like Mboro and Gishiri, where such charity events are a lifeline for families living in

Mpape and Gishiri, where such charity events are a lifeline for families living in poverty. For them, this tragedy is a bitter reminder of how quickly hope can turn into despair.

The tragedy at Holy Trinity Catholic Church is more than just a story of a stampede; it's a reflection of the difficult realities faced by many Nigerians living in areas like Mpape, Gishiri, and surrounding settlements. These communities, often neglected in terms of public services and support, have come to rely on charity events to provide for their basic needs. But in their desperation, this once-hopeful event turned into a disaster that no one could have foreseen.

As the families of the victims begin to mourn, they also reflect on the harsh realities of the life they are forced to navigate.

"Christmas was supposed to be a time of joy. Instead, we are burying loved ones. I don't know how we will survive this," said Ruth Idoko, her voice breaking.

Following the stampede which claimed about 70 lives in the three incidents, the federal government has issued an advisory on public events this Yuletide season and condoled with families and loved ones of those who lost their lives in the tragic stampedes that occurred during food distribution in Ibadan, Abuja and Okija in Anambra State.

This came as the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja expressed profound sorrow over the death of more than 10 people and injuries to several others during a food-sharing event organized by the St. Vincent de Paul Society at Holy Trinity Parish, Maitama, Abuja.

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FG issues advisory

The Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, who disclosed news of the advisory, said: “Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims, their families, and all those affected by these unfortunate incidents. The minister in a statement by his Special Assistant (Media), Rabiul Ibrahim, said the tragedies were deeply saddening and underscored the importance of ensuring proper crowd management during such charitable activities, especially during the festive season.

While acknowledging the noble intentions of organizers seeking to bring relief to vulnerable members of society, the minister strongly admonished all individuals and organizations planning similar events to liaise with the police and other law enforcement agencies for effective crowd control and security measures. He emphasized that collaboration with law enforcement agencies was crucial to safeguarding lives and ensuring that such efforts to assist those in need did not inadvertently lead to further distress.

He appealed to politicians and other stakeholders to refrain from politicizing the unfortunate incidents, stressing that those tragic events were in no way connected to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s administration’s economic reforms.

“It is worth noting that similar unfortunate occurrences have been recorded in the

past, before the current administration, as such, making any attempt to link these tragedies to the President's reforms is unfounded and disingenuous," he said. Idris said the reforms, while repositioning the Nigerian economy for sustainable growth, were designed to uplift the lives of all Nigerians, particularly the vulnerable, without causing distress.

The minister called for a collective sense of responsibility and urged citizens to unite and ensure that the Yuletide season was marked by peace, goodwill, and joy, devoid of preventable tragedies.

Loss of 10 at Abuja food-sharing event, devastating blow – Catholic Church

On its part, the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja yesterday expressed profound sorrow over the death of more than 10 people and injuries to several others during a food-sharing event organized by the St. Vincent de Paul Society at Holy Trinity Parish, Maitama, Abuja.

The incident, described as a devastating tragedy, has left the church and community reeling from the loss.

In a statement issued by Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, Archbishop of Abuja, the Church extended condolences to the families and loved ones of the deceased and injured.

He described the incident as a blow to the community and reaffirmed the Church's dedication to supporting the poor and vulnerable through initiatives such as those led by the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

He called for unity and prayer, urging the people to pray for the repose of the departed, healing for the injured, and comfort for those affected.

Archbishop Kaigama said: "It is with profound shock and sadness that I, on behalf of the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, mourn the tragic loss of lives and those injured at the St. Vincent de Paul Society's food-sharing event at Holy Trinity Parish, Maitama, Abuja.

"This great tragedy, which claimed the lives of over ten people, is a devastating blow to our community.

"The St. Vincent de Paul Society's selfless efforts to support the poor and vulnerable in our midst are a testament to the Catholic Church's commitment to serving the

least among us.

“I extend my heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of the deceased and injured. May God grant them the strength and comfort they need during this difficult time.

“Let us come together as a community to pray for the souls of the departed, for the healing of the injured, and for the consolation of all those affected by this tragedy.”

Stampede at food event exposes urgent systemic issues – CAN

Similarly, The Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, called attention to the urgent systemic issues that have contributed to the recurring tragedies this month alone. In a statement issued by Archbishop Daniel Okoh, President of CAN, the association expressed its deep sorrow over the loss of lives, offering condolences to the affected families and the Catholic Church.

CAN stressed the need for a nationwide effort to address these systemic issues, calling on authorities to implement more effective measures to prevent further loss of life.

It emphasized the importance of compassion and unity in this time of mourning, while also urging the government and event organizers to prioritize safety and proper planning for future charitable events.

The statement read: **“The National Leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, is disturbed by the tragic events at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Maitama on Saturday morning.**

“We have learned that at least ten people, including children, lost their lives in a stampede while trying to seek help from the church.

“This tragedy is not just statistics; it represents real families who are hurting. Each person lost was someone’s beloved family member.

“This incident is part of a troubling pattern, as Nigeria has experienced two other tragic stampedes this month. On December 18, during a Christmas funfair at a school in Ibadan, a stampede resulted in the deaths of 35 children, with six others critically injured.

“Just a few days later, another stampede occurred during a rice distribution event at a centre in Anambra State. Reports indicate that at least 22 people lost their lives, and 32 others were injured.

“As we reflect on these devastating events, we invite all Nigerians to come together with kindness and understanding.

“Together, we can honour the memory of those we have lost by committing to a future filled with hope, where every life matters, and where we can gather in safety and peace, sharing in the abundance of food and support that we can provide for one another as a nation.”

Deadly stampede over food, evidence of Tinubu’s economic mismanagement -PDP
Meanwhile, Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, has described the widespread food stampede in some states of the federation as an ugly testament of the alarming misery, poverty, hunger, starvation, sense of hopelessness and desperation for survival currently plaguing Nigerians.

The party said the blame for this avoidable tragedy should rest squarely on the

The party said the blame for this avoidable tragedy should rest squarely on the shoulders of “the overtly insensitive, corrupt and rudderless Tinubu-led All Progressives Congress, APC, government.”

National Publicity Secretary of the PDP, Debo Ologunagba, said this in a statement in Abuja, yesterday said: “The party laments the tragic stampede at private events in Oyo and Anambra States as well as the FCT, Abuja which claimed the lives of about 60 vulnerable citizens including children in their desperate struggle for food as a result of the pervasive hunger in the land occasioned by the anti-people policies of the APC administration.

“The PDP is devastated that the APC-led administration has wrecked our once thriving economy and pushed millions of Nigerians deeper into abject poverty and hunger with many citizens, not being able to afford their daily meals, now resorting to suicide and desperate measures including slavery mission abroad and fighting for crumbs for survival.

“It is heartbreaking that despite our abundant resources as a nation, Nigerians have been subjected to agonizing life where they die struggling for food.

“This horrifying situation in the country further confirms the APC as a party of “political vampires and buccaneers” who have no iota of regard for human life but rather derive pleasure in the suffering and death of citizens including innocent children.

“Only this explains why the APC administration continues in arrogant false performance claims including empty assurances of food sufficiency while deliberately failing to make the required investments to boost the productive sector, particularly in agriculture and food production.

“This also explains why the APC administration has rejected all advice and suggestions by the PDP and other well-meaning Nigerians to review the hasty implementation of the suffocating policies of abrupt increase in the price of petroleum products and the floating of the Naira, despite the crippling consequences on the productive sector and life-discounting effect on the citizenry.

“More provoking is that instead of deploying the nation’s resources for the wellbeing of the people, the APC leaders are engaged in massive looting through direct pillaging of government vaults, budget padding, contract inflation, oil subsidy

direct pilaging of government vaults, budget padding, contract inflation, oil subsidy scam, palliative racketeering and phony programmes which have no benefit to the lives of the citizens.

“The PDP calls on Nigerians to hold the Tinubu-led APC administration responsible for the remote cause of these tragic occurrences for which it must recompense.

“Our party insists that any administration that is sensitive and cares for the people would have since introduced intervention programmes to ease the suffering and improve on the welfare of the masses which is the primary purpose of government.

“For the umpteenth time, the PDP demands the immediate review of all the suffocating economic and tax policies of the APC administration which are bringing misery and death to Nigerians daily.

“The PDP commiserates with Governor Seyi Makinde and the people of Oyo State for the death of the children at the private event which has brought agony and pain to many families and the people of Oyo State at this time.

“Our party commends Governor Makinde for his rapid response in swiftly moving the victims to hospitals for immediate medical assistance which helped to save many lives.

“The PDP also condoles with the families of the victims of the Anambra State and Abuja food stampede while calling for an investigation into the immediate cause of the three tragic incidents so as to prevent such sad occurrence in the future. Our party prays for the repose of the souls of dead and speedy recovery for the injured.”