

Death toll from Nigerian church collapse reaches 85

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USPA News - The death toll from a six-story church building collapse in the Nigerian city of Lagos last week has risen to at least 85, South African and Zimbabwean officials said on Friday, indicating that the total number of casualties remains higher than disclosed by Nigeria. The accident happened at around 12:44 p.m. local time on September 12 when a six-story guest house collapsed at the Lagos complex of the Synagogue Church of All Nations, which is headed by T. B. Joshua.

Nigerian officials had raised the death toll to 80 on Thursday afternoon, claiming there were no more bodies at the site. South Africa's High Commissioner to Nigeria, Lulu Mnguni, said on Friday that the number of South Africans killed in the collapse had risen from 67 to 84 after more bodies were recovered on Thursday. It is believed that the death toll could rise further as some South Africans were traveling without church tour groups, Mnguni said. The news came as state-run media in Zimbabwe reported that Greenwich Ndanga, a top opposition official from Mashonaland West province, was also killed in the collapse, making him the 85th fatality. Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) party spokesman Douglas Mwonzora confirmed that Ndanga had been killed. "Greenwich Ndanga died at TB Joshua's hostel in Nigeria. It is with sadness that we learnt of the death of Greenwich Ndanga who was our shadow MP in Mashonaland West province as well as our top official in that region," Mwonzora told the Herald newspaper. "We have not yet been advised as to funeral arrangements. Our (party) president and senior leadership will be at the funeral." Nigerian officials have been reluctant to release information about the collapse and have been slow to confirm casualty figures. Femi Oke Osanyintolu of the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA) said on Thursday afternoon that operations at the site had concluded and claimed all bodies had been recovered from the rubble. Osanyintolu said the total number of dead was 80 but acknowledged that the number did not include victims who died after being taken to hospitals. How many died at hospital is unknown. "We have told you earlier that we have issue concerning the list of people in the building before it collapsed," he was quoted as saying by the Leadership newspaper. Before the conclusion of the rescue and recovery operation, a middle-aged woman was rescued from the rubble on early Tuesday morning, nearly four days after the collapse. Authorities earlier said a total of 130 people were rescued alive from the rubble in the hours after the collapse, but it remains unclear how many people were inside the foreign guest house. With 84 South African victims, it represents one of the worst tragedies for South Africa in recent years. "Not in the recent history of our country have we had this large number of our people die in one incident outside the country," South African President Jacob Zuma said on Tuesday. Nelson Kgwele, a spokesman for South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation, said on Monday that at least five South African church tour groups were at the complex at the time of the collapse. He said officials from the South African Mission in Lagos were liaising with rescue workers at the scene to assess the situation, but Nigerian officials have rejected offers to send a South African rescue team. An investigation into the cause of the collapse also continues. T. B. Joshua initially suggested that the collapse was caused by sabotage, pointing to a small aircraft which hovered over the building several times just before the collapse, but investigators have dismissed those claims, saying improper construction was likely the cause. They said two floors were being added to the building without fortification of the initial foundation.

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