

Nigeria school exam day turns into disaster

AFP- After her early morning class ended, 16-year-old Nigerian student Chidera Denis was waiting to join classmates for end-of-term exams. Teachers had scheduled a raft of last-minute revisions.

Moments later, she was trapped under rubble as her school building suddenly collapsed, with pupils barely protected by the desks where they were sitting.

Denis was one of the lucky ones. The collapse of the Saint Academy school in Jos North district in Plateau State killed 22 students on Friday, with dozens more in hospital for treatment, including Denis's friend.

"She said she was going to die... that if they rescued me, I should tell her mother," Denis told AFP a day after the disaster.

"I said she should stop saying that, that we'll be alive, that God is our strength."

Her mother Amaka Denis tended to her on a hospital bed on Saturday morning. She had yet to see her son, who also attended the school.

"I am yet to see her brother," she told AFP. "I am still searching. I am in pain."

A spokesman for the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Yohanna Audu, told AFP on Saturday that rescue efforts had ended after the disaster, the latest fatal building collapse in Nigeria.

Audu said there were 22 fatalities, "all of whom are students".

The Red Cross posted on X on Saturday that a teacher and a student were still missing.

“I was beside someone who died,” 14-year-old Chidinma Emmanuel told AFP. “He fell down on my arm and it broke. The falling debris landed on his head and killed him.”

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu described the incident as a “huge loss to the nation”.

A day after, 58 people were still in hospital while 74 were discharged, the state commissioner for information Musa Ibrahim Ashoms said in a statement Saturday.

Building collapses are fairly common in Africa’s most populous country.

The accident Friday was the deadliest since November 2021, when a high-rise building under construction in the country’s commercial hub of Lagos collapsed and killed at least 45, most of them construction workers.

Poor quality of work, lack of oversight, and official corruption to bypass checks are often blamed for the incidents.

Ashoms said it was not immediately clear what caused the collapse in Plateau, but residents said it came after three days of heavy rains.

Although formal investigations have yet to commence, state authorities have already said there was a need to reinforce building standard codes.

“[Governor Caleb Muftwang] emphasises the need for all developers and property owners to submit their building plans to the Jos Metropolitan Development Board (JMDB) for verification and revalidation,” Ashoms said.

The school building disaster was the latest tragedy to hit

Plateau State, which has seen a series of deadly intercommunal clashes.

Gunmen killed 40 people in Zurak, a mining village 260 kilometres (160 miles) east of Jos, in May. And nearly 200 people were killed in the state last December in raids on mostly Christian villages.

AFP