

## **CHAPTER THREE**

# **REMOVAL AND DEPOSITING OF VICTIMS IN HOSPITALS**

### **(TERMS OF REFERENCE 5 AND 7)**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

There is, and has always been a medico-legal angle to every public tragedy. The loss of 14 precious lives at an adoration crusade ground in a day is obviously a public tragedy. A glance through the preceding chapters would obviously show that circumstances under which these fourteen lives were lost. There can therefore be no question that the medico-legal field has reached an unprecedented position of importance relative to the circumstances afoot.

Thus when a public disorder as the one the state experienced at the GTC Adoration Ground on 7<sup>th</sup> day of March 2002, the desire for medical assistance and control must also be fairly closely complemented by considerations of meeting the demands of the law. Hence in the circumstances, whilst medical assistance is of paramount importance, the requirement that the tragedy be contemporaneously incidented with the police is also of first importance. The police would thereafter take control of the situation; remove the corpses to the hospital or hospitals; identify the injury and also send them for medication.

From the abundant evidence before the commission the following facts emerge:

1. 14 people died at the GTC Adoration crusade on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of March 2002.
2. Many survivors received medical attention at the Ntasiobi, Annunciation and Mother of Christ Hospitals and were duly discharged.
3. The deceased were deposited at the Ntasiobi and Annunciation hospitals here in Enugu.

But relative to the removal or transportation of the victims from the adoration ground to the various hospital, the Commission obviously came to a vague end. And the reasons would be known anon.

## **2. REMOVAL OF VICTIMS TO HOSPITALS**

The evidence before the Commission clearly established that the victims including, of course, the deceased were taken to:

- a. Ntasiobi Hospital, Trans Ekulu Enugu.
- b. Annunciation Hospital, Emene Enugu.
- c. Niger Foundation Hospital, Independence Layout, Enugu
- d. Mother of Christ Hospital, Ogui Enugu.

From the evidence of Mr. Dauda Gambo, a Superintendent of Police and the D.P.O. Abakaliki Road Police Station that oversees the GTC Adoration Ground, the tragedy was not reported in his station immediately it took place. It was through a Press-Release twelve hours after the incident by one Rev. Mgnor. Obiora Ike that he got to know. By which time the corpses and victims have already been taken to the hospital. And so the police did not play any role in the removal of the victims from the GTC adoration ground.

Superintendent Gambo stated as follows:

“I received a written report from the Catholic Diocese of Enugu signed by Very Rev. Obiora Ike stating that there was an invasion and destruction of religious worshippers at the GTC Ground. The Report stated that the incident took place in the early hours of 7/3/2002, but the said report came to me by 6pm on that day”.

It would appear therefore that the victims were removed to these hospitals by relatives, friends, Catholic adherents and perhaps, good Samaritans with catholic background. The identity of these people and the mode of removal of these victims to the hospitals could not upon the evidence before us be ascertained.

The job of removal of these victims appeared to have been so hurriedly done and under a cloak of apparent secrecy. We say so, because it seems incredible that an event claiming fourteen lives and injuring many others took place around 5.30 am on 7/3/2002 and the world and indeed the police are only informed via a press-

release/report by 6pm on that day. That is almost twelve hours post the event.

It was through Exhibit 49 received at the Commission's Proceedings entitled "A Video Tape on Enugu Crusade Mishap" that the Commission is able to know from one of the surviving victims that it was her brother that brought her to the hospital.

There was also a case where it was said that Rev. Fr. Mbaka himself removed a sick/injured girl to the Mother of Christ Hospital but before he came back to see the girl she was already dead. This information could not however be authenticated because of the refusal of Rev. Fr. Mbaka to testify before the Commission or make statement relative to the event before the police.

Ordinarily nobody takes a corpse or victims to a hospital and walks away without disclosing his identify and other material particulars.

Essentially, the difficulty of the Commission in locating or identifying those who actually removed the victims from the GTC adoration ground is not unconnected with the intransigence and refusal of the authorities at (1) Ntasiobi Hospital (2) Annunciation Hospital and (3) Mother of Christ to attend the proceedings of the Commission and help it come to a reasonable findings of fact relative to the issues involved. The hospital authorities and their personnel owe certain unremitting professional and material standards to the state and to the souls of the deceased, to cooperate and provide all relevant information to the Commission so that the world is not misled.

It is inexplicable that in a tragedy of this magnitude, the hospital authorities and the organizers of the adoration crusade would conspire to deny or shield certain basic and fundamental information not only to the police but also to the Commission of inquiry set up to find the truth about the matter and recommend ways of averting future tragedies.

### **3. DEPOSITING OF VICTIMS IN HOSPITALS**

Uncontradicted evidence before the Commission shows that 24 victims including the dead and the injured were taken to four hospitals in Enugu capital city. This was confirmed by the various testimonies before the Commission; the exhibits received together with police account. The victims were deposited as follows;

**a. Ntasiobi Hospital, Trans-Ekulu Enugu**

Nine corpses were stored in its mortuary, most of them women. They are as follows:

- i. Benedette Chukwu (female)
- ii. Chiamaka Udechukwu (female)
- iii. Chikaodi Eze (female)
- iv. Ekene Enemuo (female)
- v. Theresa Ugah (female)
- vi. Not identified
- vii. Regina Elechi (female)
- viii. Esther Aniefula (female)
- ix. Theresa Amalu (female)

The seven other victims treated and discharged at the same Ntasiobi Hospital are:

- i. Regina Dan (female)
- ii. Chinwe Blessing (female)
- iii. Onyia Chinasa (female)
- iv. Ogbodo Chidinma (female)
- v. Ogbonna Ifenyinwa (female)
- vi. Sandra Ilodigwe (female)
- vii. Ebere Emmanuel Ituma (female)

**b. Annunciation Hospital Emene**

Two corpses were deposited, namely:

- i. Beatrice Ibudialor (female)
- ii. Toochukwu Ekejia

A victim whose name was given as Ukamaka Ekejia was treated at the hospital and discharged.

**c. Mother of Christ Hospital**

Four corpses were deposited at the above hospital on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of March 2002 and they were later transferred to Ntasiobi Hospital Mortuary. One other victim was treated and discharged.

**d. Niger Foundation Hospital**

One male victim was treated in the above hospital and discharged.

**e. U.N.T.H. Enugu**

No victim was treated or deposited here. The doctors in the hospital were said to be on strike at the time.

**f. Park Lane Hospital**

No victim was deposited or treated in this hospital.

**FOUR UNAUTOPSIED CORPSES**

The Commission notes that four corpses were released to their relations by the hospital authorities for burial. This is however before the police directed that no corpse must be released to relations until autopsy was conducted. This was why the remaining corpses were preserved for post-mortem examination.

Samuel Akuba, a superintendent of Police incharge of Homicide at the C.I.D. section at the Police Headquarters stated as follows:

“Between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> March 2002, a relation took one corpse to Abor for burial. The sister in-charge of Administration at the Ntasiobi hospital gave us this information. No autopsy was conducted on four of those who died at the adoration ground. We could not get the names of those corpses that were removed, because of the frosty relations between police and the hospitals. We also had no information as to those responsible for depositing the corpses in the hospitals”.

(Emphasis supplied)

It would seem therefore that the burial of those stated four corpses before autopsy was conducted on them, has a direct bearing upon the lack of communication between the police and the organizers of the crusade. In other words, if the police had not intervened relative to the remainder (10 corpses), the hospitals may well have released the corpses to their relations for burial without the advantage of an autopsy.

**WHO DEPOSITED THE CORPSES IN THE HOSPITALS**

As we have seen from preceding passages, the relevant hospital authorities inexplicably turned their backs on the Commission. They

were very unwilling to provide any information relative to who brought the corpses and, or the victims to their hospitals.

The question which really intrigued the Commission is the choice of hospitals. Catholic hospitals or hospitals with catholic background and influence. We say so because the tragedy occurred at the GTC Enugu. In that neighbourhood there are many hospitals including, of course the State owned Park Lane Hospital. There is also a nearby UNTH. If the last two hospitals at the time were incapacitated by strike action, why were the other private hospitals in the neighbourhood avoided?

The Commission is unwilling to speculate on the matter. The decision may have been motivated by the best of noble intentions not perhaps unconnected with:

- a. denominational fidelity as most of the victims were catholic worshippers;
- b. quality of facilities and services available in the hospitals; and
- c. cost of medication.

But because the hospital authorities refused to respond to our invitation to testify and clear certain vague ends, the above remains at best, a surmise. And the Commission cannot pursue the question further.

However, the Commission deprecates in strong terms the attitude exhibited by the authorities and personnel of Ntasiobi hospital and Annunciation hospital. The Commission considers it as grossly contumacious, unbecoming of a social service institution of great importance. The Commission was merely in search of the truth of how 14 citizens of this country lost their lives. No body was on trial before the Commission. Knowing the truth as to what really happened ought reasonably to have been a matter of serious concern to the hospitals which treated the victims and received the body of dead ones.

The Commission did not want to compel compliance of its summons by issuance of coercive orders because:

- i. it did not want to further create tension in the state;
- ii. it did not want to use its processes to announce and popularize certain persons and places.

Evidently, Section 14 of the Commission of Inquiry Law, cap 24 Laws of Eastern Nigeria enacts as follows:

“Any person who being summoned to attend as witness or produce a book, document or any other thing refuses or neglects to do so or to answer any question put to him by or with the concurrence of the commissioners shall be liable

- (a) \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) on summary conviction to a fine of fifty pounds”.

In any case, the impression was created in the mind of the Commission that these people and institutions either have something to hide or were under a kind of oath or instruction to keep away from the proceedings of the Commissions.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The State should consider the enactment of law which must stipulate the criteria upon which its open spaces could be used for religious activities and crusade.
2. Such law must have provisions stipulating the level of security and medical support services to be provided by the organizers of the religious activities or crusades.
3. Such law must also provide sanctions and liability relative to indiscretions and negligence on the part of the organizers which occasions, harm to life and limb, or even death.