



DISASTER
RELIEF

CASE REPORT
Nigeria—Explosion
May 26, 1972

Agency for International Development
Washington, D.C. 20523

NIGERIA

Explosion

Explosion rips through flour mill injuring more than 100. Sixty-seven persons were hospitalized with severe burns . . . 21 later died.

Value of U.S. Assistance \$11,000

A flash explosion occurred on May 26, 1972 in the largest flour mill in Nigeria near Lagos. The explosion of unknown causes was limited to the six floors of the packing area. Management officials insisted that all appropriate measures were taken to minimize the danger of a dust explosion, but conceded that flour dust was the only inflammable substance known to be present in the area of the explosion. Injuries were limited to the packing area because a heavy internal concrete wall protected workers in adjoining milling, sifting, and grading rooms. Also, the blast happened during the firm's lunch break when many of the workers were away from the affected area. The injured were Nigerian employees of the mill and two German supervisory employees.

Foreign Disaster Case Reports are publications of the Office of the Foreign Disaster Relief Coordinator, Agency for International Development. This office has responsibility for coordinating U.S. Government foreign disaster relief responses and for the further coordination of such activities with those of the U.S. private and international disaster relief communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ACTION TAKEN BY THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT:

Nigerian authorities responded promptly. Police and fire officials maintained order and treated the injured on the scene. No single Lagos hospital could handle the unprecedented case-load of victims. They were, consequently, transported to all civilian hospitals in and around Lagos. Some victims were admitted to the Nigerian Army Hospital. Available hospital supplies for treating the patients were inadequate and some were soon depleted. An emergency request for more medical supplies was sent from the Lagos State Government to the U.S. Embassy through the Embassy physician, who was assisting in treating the burn patients.

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND VOLUNTARY AGENCIES:

In submitting the request to the Embassy, the physician indicated several patients had died because of lack of appropriate drugs and medications and that there were many others in serious condition and likely to die if treatment were to be delayed. The Ambassador exercised his disaster relief authority and cabled U.S. Military facilities in Germany for plasma, saline solution, dextrose, other burn treatment supplies and medicines, along with air transportation to meet a deadline of 2000 hours May 27. The U.S. Army 97th General Hospital in Frankfurt cabled back immediately that it was attempting to assemble the medicines but doubted it could airlift them in time to meet the deadline. Copies of both messages were simultaneously received by FDRC in Washington.

FDRC, being aware that Caritas/Catholic Relief Services maintains a reserve of medical supplies in Kinshasa, Zaire, asked the American Embassy in Kinshasa to determine availability of these supplies from Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and if the Mission could airlift them in its own plane or arrange for commercial charter.

The CRS Director in Kinshasa received the call from the AID Mission at 10:00 AM May 27. By noon four crates containing plasma, dextrose, kits and needles were packed, banded and ready to go. But Caritas/CRS

could not provide all supplies or quantities requested, and the Embassy plane was out of the country for servicing. Through the CRS representative, the AID Mission Director and President Mobutu's personal physician, the President of Zaire was made aware of the situation and of the urgency in providing treatment for the burn patients. He authorized filling the balance of the requirements from Government of Zaire medical stocks and the use of his personal jet and crew to deliver them along with the supplies provided by Caritas/CRS. This cooperative effort on the part of the Governments of Zaire and the United States and Caritas/CRS Kinshasa made it possible for the necessary burn treatment supplies to be delivered to Lagos at 1800 hours on May 27, two hours ahead of the deadline. Replenishment of Government of Zaire stocks was authorized from the AID contingency fund by the Ambassador and FDRC at an estimated cost of \$11,000.

Additional units of plasma, gauze dressing, mannitol (carbohydrate alcohol) and other supplies were later provided by the U.S. Army Medical Depot, Eisedlerhof, Germany. Cost or value was not reported. They were sent via Alitalia Airlines at no expense to the USG and arrived in Lagos on May 29.

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY OTHER NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

As stated previously, the Government of Zaire and Zaire Caritas cooperated in providing medical supplies and the President of Zaire permitted the use of his personal jet to deliver them. Value of this contribution was not reported.

A Royal Air Force medical team, consisting of a plastic surgeon and an anesthetist, was sent to Lagos by the British High Commission (BHC) from the United Kingdom to assess the rehabilitative treatment required by the more severely burned and, if necessary, to transfer them to a British hospital specializing in burn cases. The BHC offered the Government of Nigeria the use of a VC-10 jet aircraft for transporting the victims. The team, however, concluded that the treatment of the victims in the Lagos hospitals was adequate and air evacuation was not necessary.

