

At least 60 killed as crowded church collapses in Nigeria

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Lagos: At least 60 people were killed when the roof of a crowded church collapsed onto worshippers in southern Nigeria on Saturday, witnesses and an official said.

The Reigners Bible Church International in Uyo, capital of Akwa Ibom state, was still under construction and workers had been rushing to finish it in time for Saturday's ceremony to ordain founder Akan Weeks as a bishop, congregants said.

Hundreds of people, including Gov. Udom Emmanuel, were inside when metal girders crashed onto worshippers and the corrugated iron roof caved in, they said.

Bodies of at least 60 victims have been retrieved but the toll could mount as a crane removes debris, according to a rescue official.

Emmanuel and Weeks, who preached that God will make his followers rich, escaped unhurt.

The governor's spokesman, Ekerete Udoh, said the state government will hold an inquiry to investigate if anyone compromised building standards.

Buildings collapse regularly in Nigeria because of endemic corruption with contractors using sub-standard materials and bribing inspectors to ignore shoddy work or a lack of building permits.

In 2014, 116 people died when a multi-story guesthouse of the Synagogue Church of All Nations collapsed in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital. Most victims were visiting South African followers of the megachurch's influential founder T. B. Joshua.

Two structural engineers, Joshua and church trustees have been accused of criminal negligence and involuntary manslaughter after a coroner found the building collapsed from structural failures caused by design and detailing errors.

But Lagos state government efforts to bring them to court have been foiled by repeated legal challenges that have delayed a trial.

- (With AP inputs)