**Lightning kills 2 pupils, injures 85 (Zimbabwe)**

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By Freeman Razemba and Margaret Matibiri
TWO pupils from Chinatsa Secondary School in Marondera were killed on Thursday afternoon, while 85 others were injured after being struck by lightning while awaiting dismissal at the assembly point.

National police spokesperson Chief Superintendent Paul Nyathi confirmed the incident.

“The Zimbabwe Republic Police would like to confirm the death of two juveniles at Chinatsa Secondary School in Mashonaland East Province on 26 January 2017 at around 1520hours after being struck by lightning.

“The juveniles, Munashe Godknows Munemo (15) and Blessed Muchenga (17) were part of students who were at an assembly point at the school awaiting dismissal when a bolt of lightning struck and hit 85 students leading to the death of the duo. Fifty-seven (57) students were treated and discharged, while 26 others were admitted at Marondera General Hospital,” he said.

When The Herald news crew visited the school yesterday, only six students were present.

The headmistress Ms Greanny Ndlovu refused to comment.

Said Edmond Mutsvara (16), a Form Two pupil who was present when the incident took place: “I was on my way from the sporting fields near the assembly point where some of the pupils were gathered awaiting an early dismissal because it looked like it was going to rain heavily and suddenly, I saw a bright light and its impact pushed me and I fell on the ground but I was not injured.

“When I got up, there was chaos everywhere. Blessed Muchenga who was walking close to where I was near a tree was struck by lightning and died on the spot. “When I looked around I saw smoke coming from where most of the pupils were gathered. They were screaming in pain, calling out for help while removing their uniforms that had caught fire.

“I ran to where they were trying to help out, and some of them were seriously burnt and bleeding. Godknows Munemo who was on his bicycle under a tree next to the assembly point also died on the spot.”

School Development Committee chairman Mr Happy Benhura, who was at the school when tragedy struck said he had to call for help as too many students were injured.

“I was in the headmistress’ office and when I walked out, there was a lot of smoke as if teargas had been sprayed there, I could not help the pupils who were all screaming for help, so I ran to Village 4 and called for people to come and help,” Mr Benhura said.

Muchenga’s aunt Mrs Norah Shekede, who was also his guardian, said she was still shocked and very hurt since she had spoken to him 20 minutes earlier during his lunch break.

“He was a hardworking boy and very prayerful. He had just left for school after his lunch time break before the accident happened and when I arrived at the scene, I thought I could pull his tongue out using a pliers but it was too late,” she said.

Meanwhile, two people – a man and his four-year-old son – drowned in Kondo River, Mudzi after they attempted to cross the flooded river last Sunday evening.

Chief Supt Nyathi said the two drowned after they attempted to cross a flooded river in Mudzi.

The incident occurred last Sunday at around 6pm.

“Patron Dziso (24) and his son, Charles Dziso (four) were swept away by water after they attempted to cross Kondo River, which was flooded. Their bodies were discovered by villagers after a thorough search, after they had failed to reach their destination,” Chief Supt Nyathi said.

He called on members of the public to be patient and wait for the water to subside whenever they come across flooded rivers and bridges. “With the rainy season in full swing, members of the public are urged to take precautionary measures when it is about to rain, during or after, and ensure lives are safeguarded.

“Please avoid taking shelter at isolated places or being the sole target at open spaces, avoiding contact with electrical gadgets and seeking shelter under isolated tall trees or other objects,” he said.

Earlier this month, six mourners were killed while four others were seriously injured by lightning in Siamwinde Village 1 in Binga. The victims were part of a gathering attending a funeral wake on January 15 when heavy rains pounded the area. They sought shelter under a tree and were struck by a bolt of lightning, killing them instantly.

The best way to avoid being struck by lightning is to stay away from storms and one can do this by paying attention to the weather. People are also advised not to seek shelter under trees or walk on open ground when it is raining, as lightning normally target taller objects.

Lightning strikes can also be avoided by staying away from objects that may conduct electricity and taking shelter in a car.