

## **Rwanda: One Dies, 14 Hurt in Lightning Strikes**

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One person was killed while 14 others were injured after lightning struck different locations in Gakenke and Gatsibo districts on Wednesday.

At least five people were seriously injured after lightning struck a church they were praying from in Rwimbogo Sector, Gatsibo District.

The deceased was identified as Raphael Barabamenye, a father of three from Gakenke District. Nine others were injured in Gakenke District.

The injured in Gatsibo were identified as Theonira Mukaruhumuriza, 27, of Munini cell, Console Nyirabizeyimana, 18, and Fortune Mukandayisenga, 17, of Nyamwiza cell.

Others are Claver Munyeshyaka, 25 and another only identified as Felicita, 56, residents of the same villages.

The three who were seriously injured were rushed to Kiziguro Hospital, while two others continued to receive treatment at Rwimbogo health centre.

According to John Mushumba, the executive secretary of Rwimbogo Sector, it is not clear whether all were injured directly by the lightning or in the ensuing stampede.

"It took us by surprise; the people in the church were the victims of sudden heavy downpour. Three of the injured are in critical condition and under close monitoring of doctors," he said. He said the families of the affected were still struggling to come to terms with the tragedy.

"I am saddened by this tragedy that befell the Christians as they took time to worship their creator," Mushumba said. He said apart from the injuries, several houses and crops were destroyed in the district by storm and heavy rains. Richard Murego, executive secretary of Gitoke Sector, also said the storm had devastating effect.

"The rain was accompanied by heavy wind that destroyed houses and several hectares of banana plantation in several sectors. We are still assessing the general impact," he said. The incident happened in the evening as the ADPR faithful worshipped, according to eye witnesses. "People were inside the church attending the service when the lightning struck. I first heard thunder which frightened almost everybody and few minutes later I just saw a stampede," said Claude Muneza, an eye witness. James Gakuba, an area resident, said the incident was terrible as for several minutes every person was motionless.

"The thunder left everyone in the village shivering... it was so heavy. The injured persons were severely burnt, but all except one is doing well," he said.

## Gakenke

Meanwhile, the injured in Gakenke included seven students from Groupe Scolaire Mwumba and two other residents from Mataba Sector.

They were rushed to a nearby health centre for intensive care but had been discharged by press time yesterday, according to officials.

Heavy rains also destroyed buildings in Muzo, Mataba, Ruli and Rushashi sectors, according to Superintendent Christopher Semuhungu, the Northern Regional Police spokesperson.

The cost of destroyed properties, including roofs of schools and residential houses, was yet to be evaluated.

Semuhungu urged owners of schools and other public buildings in the province to put in place lightning conductors.

"People should remain indoors whenever it rains, and avoid seeking shelter under isolated trees, they should also avoid handling electrical equipment such as telephones, radios and TV sets to avoid the risk of lightning strikes," Semuhungu said.

The heavy downpour started at around 3:15pm.

"When we intervened we found seven students lying on the ground with injuries, we rushed them to hospital but all were discharged today (Thursday) and continue to receive medical care at their home," said Pascal Niyitegeka, the headmaster of Mwumba school.

At least 19 people died of lightning while another 43 sustained injuries and 23 were left traumatised due to lightning strikes between January and April, this year, according to figures from the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugees affairs.

Last year alone, lightning killed 28 people and injured another 53, according to statistics.

A document developed by the ministry on the prevention of lightning also lists keeping off bicycles and motorcycles during rain, avoiding wet areas, refraining from standing near open windows as well as avoid handling electrical equipment such as telephones, radios and TV sets to avoid the risk of lightning strikes.

Residents should also steer clear of tall buildings, tall trees, fences, telephone masts, and power lines during rain.