

Stellenbosch to analyse DNA from Nigerian church deaths

The DNA samples gathered from the 116 people who died in the collapse of the building in Nigeria over a month ago have arrived at a laboratory in Stellenbosch for analysis.



Minister of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation, Jeff Radebe, says that once the DNA tests are completed, the bodies of those who died when a guesthouse collapsed in Lagos will be repatriated to South Africa. Image: GCIS

Minister of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation, Jeff Radebe, said work at the laboratory on identifying the victims who died is underway. The laboratory was appointed by the Nigerian government to conduct the analysis.

"The SAPS Forensic Team has already collected the necessary ante-mortem samples from blood relatives of South Africans presumed to have lost their lives in the tragedy," said the Radebe during a media briefing in Cape Town.

He said only once the DNA analysis has been finalised will the South African government be able to conclusively identify those South Africans who died in the incident.

"The results of the DNA analysis will enable authorities to link specific mortal remains with their rightful families. Since the DNA process is in the hands of the Nigerian authorities, we are unable to provide any update regarding the time this process will take," said Radebe.

The deaths occurred after a guesthouse belonging to the Synagogue Church of All Nations in Nigeria collapsed. Of the 116 bodies, 81 are believed to be South African.

Bodies will be repatriated

A total of 85 bodies will be repatriated to South Africa, including three Zimbabwean and one Democratic Republic of the Congo nationals, at the request of their respective governments.

Radebe said government reiterated its commitment to making sure the mortal remains of South Africans are brought back home for burial by their families and communities.

As part of the preparation for the repatriation of the mortal remains, the Inter-Ministerial Task Team met with the political representatives of provincial governments on 13 October to brief them on progress made so far in assisting families with the repatriation process.

Radebe said once the process of identification through DNA testing is concluded and the Nigerian authorities give authorisation for the release the mortal remains, the National Joint Intelligence Structure (NATJOINTS) will deploy a team to that country to finalise all necessary administrative processes for the mortal remains to return to South Africa.

The team will comprise of the National Disaster Management Centre, South African Military Health Service, Department of Health and the SAPS Forensic Service.

"The NATJOINTS has identified an aircraft that will be used to transport the mortal remains of the deceased South Africans. The aircraft will depart from Air Force Base Waterkloof with Forensic Pathology Service vehicles that are suitably equipped for the purpose.



The DNA tests to identify the mortal remains of the 116 people who died when a church guesthouse in Lagos fell down will be conducted at a Stellenbosch laboratory. Image: [Health Street](#)

"Upon arrival in Lagos, the teams will proceed to the three different facilities where the mortal remains are being kept. Once the mortal remains have been retrieved, the teams will return to the airport for the flight to South Africa," Radebe said.

From there the bodies will be transported by road to their respective provinces where the families will make their own funeral arrangements.

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