

Fuel tanker blast in Sierra Leone capital kills nearly 100 people

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The blast after the collision with a truck in Freetown claimed victims among those who had flocked to collect fuel leaking from the ruptured vehicle [File: Michael Dalder/Reuters]

Freetown, November 6 (RHC)-- A fuel tanker has exploded following a collision in the capital of Sierra Leone, causing numerous casualties, the central morgue and local authorities said. The government has not yet confirmed the death toll, but the manager of the central state morgue in Freetown said it had received 91 bodies following the explosion on Friday.

The explosion took place after a bus struck the tanker in Wellington, a suburb just to the east of Freetown. Victims included people who had gathered to collect fuel leaking from the ruptured vehicle, Yvonne Aki-

Sawyers, mayor of the port city, said in a post on Facebook.

Several badly burned victims lay on the streets as fire blazed through shops and houses nearby, social media images showed, although the Reuters news agency was not immediately able to independently verify the clips. “The video and photo footage making rounds on social media are harrowing,” Aki-Sawyers said. “There are rumors that more than 100 people have lost their lives.”

The extent of damage to property was as yet unknown, the mayor said, adding that police and her deputy were at the scene to assist disaster management officials. “We’ve got so many casualties, burned corpses,” said Brima Bureh Sesay, head of the National Disaster Management Agency, in a video from the scene shared online. “It’s a terrible, terrible accident.”

Omar Fofana, a journalist speaking from the scene of the explosion, said many people have been expressing concern, while some have been “wailing.” So far, he said, some 97 “charred bodies” have been received at the central mortuary – according to the mortuary officials.

“There are more than 100 people who are injured and admitted at various hospitals across the country,” Fofana told Al Jazeera. Health services have been stretched, with hospitals “asking for everything that they need to be able to respond,” he added.

President Julius Maada Bio, who was in Scotland attending the United Nations climate talks on Saturday, deplored the “horrendous loss of life.” “My profound sympathies with families who have lost loved ones and those who have been maimed as a result,” he wrote on Twitter.

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