

News

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Pawpaw tree dispute turns deadly in Owo, retired principal allegedly kills mother of four



The suspect (retired Principal cum Moslem Cleric)

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- ***Husband recounts frantic call from deceased wife in her final hours***

Tragedy struck the ancient town of Owo in **Ondo State** on Friday when a 45-year-old petty trader and mother of four, Caroline Oluwaseun Agoi, was allegedly murdered by her neighbour during a long-running dispute over pawpaw trees.

The suspect, Alhaji Kazeem Ayodele Abdullahi, a retired school principal and Muslim cleric who reportedly owns a mosque in the Uselu area of Owo, has been arrested by the police.

Residents say the street where the incident occurred is named after him, even as Police sources confirmed that Abdullahi is currently being detained at the Ondo State Police Headquarters in Akure.

The fatal confrontation was said to have stemmed from a disagreement between the suspect and the victim's family over two pawpaw trees in the Agoi family compound, whose fruits and leaves allegedly fell into the neighbour's compound over a shared fence.

According to the deceased's husband, Oluwaseun Temidire Agoi, the dispute had persisted for some time despite attempts by community leaders to mediate.

“I am a driver to the Olori of Olowo of Owo, Olori Olanike Ajibade Ogunoye. I was once a driver to the late Chief Adedibu, the Ibadan strong politician, before I relocated to Owo to continue my job as a driver,” he said.

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“For some time now, there have been arguments over the two pawpaw trees in my compound, as my neighbour, the suspect, has been complaining that the ripe pawpaw leaves and fruits drop into his compound through the wall fence we both share. He asked me to cut down the fruits. I cut down one, but refused to cut the other one since I love the fruit. However, he insisted that I should cut down the other one, which I declined.

“Some elders and our community association (Ifesowapo Community Association) tried to settle the dispute when I reported, but all to no avail, as the suspect insisted I should cut down the pawpaw tree.”

The husband said he was at work at the Olowo’s palace when his wife called him around 10 a.m. on Friday.

“While at work, my wife called me and said the cleric had come again and was with a big plank. As she was shouting, her phone went dead! I quickly picked an okada and rushed to the house, but saw the suspect dashing out from our compound into his own,” he recounted.

“I rushed in to see my wife, lo and behold, a plank was on her head. I shook her, I cried, I tried to wake her up, but she was not moving. I quickly alerted the public and ran to the suspect’s house. He had locked the doors to his house both from the front and back. I was in a fury. I started throwing stones at the roof, but he did not come out. If I had got him, I would have killed him.”

According to him, the victim was rushed to a hospital but was pronounced dead.

“We rushed her to the State Hospital, but she was already dead. We later reported the case at the police station. The suspect had fled home and made attempts to flee the town when he was apprehended at the Junction by Second Transformer leading to the Expressway. He wanted to flee the town. He was first taken to the Ijebu-Owo Police station, but the police transferred him to the Akure Homicide section,” he said.

Expressing shock at the incident, the grieving husband added: “I cannot imagine how a man who called himself a Muslim cleric and a retired School Principal could just behave like that. My late wife had four children for me, and now they are motherless. I want justice without delay.”

The bereaved husband said some sympathisers had wanted to take the law into their own hands following the incident.

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“Sympathisers had wanted to take laws into their own hands and even burn down his Mosque and house, but I said they should not do that,” he said.

The victim’s daughter, Opemipo Agoi, a student of the School of Health Technology in Akure, said she was tricked into returning home by a relative after the incident.

“I am a student of Health Tech, Akure. I got a call from my Cousin, Elizabeth Alebiosu, who told me she was sick and I should come and assist her. When I got to her at Owo, she said she had to trick me to come home as she could not relate the story on the phone,” she said tearfully.

“When I saw my mother’s lifeless body, I broke into tears. My mother has been struggling together with my father to make sure we are all educated. Now the heavy burden is on our father. I cannot imagine how a neighbour will kill another neighbour. Who does that?”

One of the victim’s sons, Israel Agoi, said he had left home less than an hour before the attack and returned to a shocking scene.

“It was not quite long. I left my mother at home when I was called and told what happened, and I had to rush back. As I got home, I met about six police officers at our house. The house I had just left was not less than one hour away! I was shocked to my bone marrow seeing my lifeless mother on the ground with the plank!”

He alleged that the attack appeared to have been planned.

“This is a premeditated murder. I believe the suspect wanted me to leave the house before he came into our house to wreak havoc. You see, at 10 am, everywhere would have been silent as students and workers would have left home.”

Israel added that the dispute involved more than the pawpaw trees.

“The cleric also said my mother was burning waste outside, and the fumes were disturbing him. Imagine? We cannot burn refuse outside, and we cannot plant our fruits in our compound demarcated with a brick fence? This is ridiculous.”

The Secretary of the Ifesowapo Community Landlords’ Association in Uselu, Chief Obasekola Alasi, confirmed that the dispute had earlier been reported to the association.

“Segun, the husband of the deceased, reported to the Association that the cleric had asked them to cut down the pawpaw trees, but he cut only one and refused to cut the second one. That was all.

“In fact, the suspect had abandoned his house and his mosque. He was fleeing the town when he was arrested.”

Residents say the suspect’s house and mosque have since been deserted, while the remains of the deceased have been deposited at the Federal Medical Centre, Owo, as police continue investigations into the killing.