

# OSOGBO MOSQUE'S MURDER: We only tried to stop deceased from harming Imam, incident was hijacked by mob —Suspects

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**CP Ibrahim Gotan**

THE five suspects arrested by the Osun State Police Command in connection with the alleged murder of one Ahmed Adewale Najeem by worshippers at Ummu-Hanni Adigun Memorial Central Mosque, Ayedun Estate, Ogo Oluwa Area, Osogbo, have spoken on what led to the fracas, saying that no one had the intention of killing the deceased but only to subdue him until the arrival of the police. They claimed that their efforts at calming Najeem, who was very aggressive, were hijacked by an irate mob, which considered the attack on the mosque's Imam, Alhaji Abdulgafar Zakariyau, as unprovoked and unwarranted.

The arrested suspects were the mosque's Imam, Alhaji Zakariyau, Abdulwasiu Olatunji, Kusamotu Akeem, Folorunso Mukaila, and Zakariyau Afeez.

The Command's spokesman, DSP Abiodun Ojelabi, who confirmed the arrest to Sunday Tribune when contacted, explained that on Friday, January 30, the police received a report from a community leader (Baale) that the Imam in charge of the mosque, Alhaji Zakariyau, had called him to report that Najeem, now deceased, was seen in the mosque with other worshippers for morning prayer (Subh) when he suddenly started misbehaving during the prayer session.

Najeem was accused of causing damage in the mosque, which resulted in him being beaten by some of the congregants. It was further learnt that as a result of the beating, Najeem became unconscious.

The PPRO said that "he (Najeem) was rushed to Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Hospital, Jaleyemi, Osogbo, where he was confirmed dead." Ojelabi added that the remains of the deceased had been deposited at the morgue of the Osun State University Teaching Hospital, Osogbo, for an autopsy to be carried out.

Findings by Sunday Tribune revealed that on the day of the incident, which was Jumat, regarded as a special day by all Muslim faithful, it was Subh prayer time at the Ummu-Hanni mosque. At about 6:10 a.m., while the prayer was ongoing, Najeem, 25 years old, joined the congregation in observing Salat.



Ummu-Hanni Adigun memorial central mosque, Ogo Oluwa area, Osogbo, Osun State. Photo: Google

After that, the Imam of the mosque began a lecture (Taleem), with some adherents staying back to listen while a few others left. However, Najeem reportedly began observing Naflah (prayer), probably because he was late in joining others at the beginning of the Subh prayer. After concluding his prayer, he was said to have joined others in listening to the lecture.

At a point, he raised his hand as someone who wanted to ask a question, which made the Imam pause. Surprisingly, however, Najeem went for the microphone stand, pulled off its connecting cords and attempted to

smash it on the Imam's head. The Imam, however, shielded his head with his hand, which was hit. As Najeem attempted to hit the Imam a second time, Sunday Tribune learnt that the congregation quickly rushed at him. They were said to have started beating him, while one of the worshippers hit him with an offering box.

After taking Najeem out of the mosque, he was reportedly put in a drainage, with many people hitting him with any object they could lay their hands on, especially sticks.

Fortunately, the Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) installed in the mosque captured the scenes and all the people involved, which also assisted the police in arresting the culprits.

In an interview, Imam Zakariyah, aged 51, who is also an Arabic teacher in a private school, narrated how the incident occurred: "On every Jumat (Friday), after the lecture, I usually address the congregation. As I was thanking God for keeping us alive, someone whom I had never seen in my life stood up as if he wanted to ask a question, but I could not hear what he was saying. We thought he was drunk because he held a plastic bottle, which we thought contained alcohol. He also held his phone. That was when people thought of taking him outside the mosque, but what he did was attempt to snatch the microphone I was holding from me. He forcefully pulled out its cords, picked the mic stand and attempted to hit me with it. I blocked him with my hand. He attempted it again and I ran behind him. People rushed at him, asking him if he wanted to kill me.

"He was taken outside. I called the chairman of the Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC). He also prayed with us in the mosque that morning but had left for home. I narrated what happened to him, pleading with him to help call the police. By the time he came with the police, the man had been placed in the drainage by the roadside.

"I was so shaken that I could not even pull myself together. To be truthful, I did not know that he was beaten so much until I saw it in the CCTV recording. People were saying that it was probable he had taken hard drugs, suggesting that he should be beaten to make him regain a clear head. I warned the people not to hit him on the head, but the noise around buried my voice. I am sure it was the devil at work."

Another worshipper, Mukaila, aged 57, said that he only used a mop stick to hit Najeem on the shoulder so as to render him weak before the arrival of the police. "I did not beat him in a way that would make him sustain an injury. In the CCTV footage, it could be seen that I used a mop stick to hit him on the shoulder, not a big one, but the matter turned fatal due to those who hijacked it. Those of us at the lecture were not more than 12. Others had left the mosque. When the man was taken out, he was still very aggressive, so we tried to tame him so that he would not injure others until the police arrived.

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"This was because, as one of us approached the deceased while he was in the drainage, he dragged the worshipper's legs towards himself and bit him five times. The CCTV recording showed it. So, we were forced to tie his legs while waiting for law enforcement agents. He was still struggling with us, displaying so much strength. Later, he dragged himself to hide in a space in the drainage. That was where the police met him, and we had to join them to drag him out as he held on to a pipe. It was when he was brought out that we tied his hands to be able to put him in a vehicle that would take him to the police station.

"When we got to the station, we were told to take him to a hospital for treatment because he was looking weak. At the Osun State Hospital, Asubiaro, Osogbo, we did not see any doctor to attend to him. We were so concerned, praying not to get into trouble. We took him to the Catholic Hospital close to the State Hospital. There, the doctors came to check him and told us he was dead. We worshippers looked into one another's faces and knew we had landed in trouble.

"We never knew him; we never saw him before that day, and we did not have the intention of harming him. Where we believe we made a mistake was that we, the elderly ones in the mosque, should have chased away the mob that came to hijack the incident, but at the same time, we were working frantically to subdue the man. We later learnt that he came from a place known as Ota Efun to Osogbo, which is quite a distance. We kept wondering why he came to our mosque to create this problem. I have learnt a lot from what happened. I pray for the repose of the soul of the departed and for forgiveness for all of us," he narrated.

Another suspect, Kusamotu, 50 years old, said that while in the drainage, the deceased wanted to run away when the Imam was calling the Baale. Kusamotu said: "All I did was to try to stop him. I used my leg to brush him so as to hold him down, but he got hold of my leg, dragged me down to himself, started struggling with me, squeezed my cloth round my neck and gave me bites in five different parts of my body. People had to beat him so that he would release me. He was too strong for me to handle. I could not even see clearly again."

Angered by the bites he sustained, Kusamotu said he hit the deceased on the shoulder with a stick, adding: "I had to go to the hospital to treat the injuries he gave me, including the bites. I was there when I was called to come and make a statement."

DSP Ojelabi said that the suspects would be charged to court after the conclusion of the investigation.