

Widow's agony over son's missing corpse



• Widow, Madam Okanlawon

TUNBOSUN OGUNDARE

MADAM Nosifat Okanlawon lost her 32-year-old son in a mysterious circumstance. The visible apprehension and the feelings of hopelessness on her face, suggested that she, indeed, has not yet got over the induced agony and trauma of losing the son.

Even apart from the fact that the death came suddenly and that he was gruesomely murdered, the police, who allegedly killed him took the body away, and till today, its whereabouts in unknown.

The incident, described as tragic and shocking by the distraught mother, took place at Ikoyi Ile, in Oyo State, on Tuesday, October 24. The day coincided with the Salah celebration held recently.

According to the 67-year-old mother, the news of the death was brought to her at Kisi, in Oyo State, by the deceased's younger brother.

This was second day after the incident, and the community was in confusion.

Said she, "it was his immediate younger brother who come to inform me. He came to Kisi where I live to do this. The town is not very far from Ikoyi Ile. It's about an hour's journey or thereabout.

Initially, the woman found it very difficult to believe the news, not because according to her the emissary could tell a lie, but because she could not imagine what could have warranted the killing of her son.

"So, for over an hour, I was in shock and a state of confusion", said the petty trader widow who could not initially find words to describe her feelings when she heard of the news, noting that "I didn't know what became of me, until later when the whole story was explained to me".

The worried mother who came to Ikoyi Ile the next day to find things out herself was further surprised when she got to know that the suspected killers of her son took the body away. "I learnt that immediately my son was shot, he fell down headlong inside gutter.

The people around rushed to rescue him, but I was told that the police prevented them", said Madam Okanlawon,

They threatened to kill whoever that dared them, to the extent that in the process, they shot one man on the thigh while hitting gun butt on another's head. And they later took away my son's body". And up till today (last week Saturday), we don't know the whereabouts of his body.

The incident is over a month now, and yet, the family does not know where the police deposited his body.

"It was about six weeks that the son was killed and up till now that I am talking to you (Wednesday, last week), I have never seen his body and no member of the family knows its whereabouts," said Madam.

Okanlawon, who added that "To make it more painful and to do cover up, the police deny ever killing my son. They even said there was no crisis in Ikoyi Ile. Is that not too funny? On the part of the police who are regarded as protectors of lives and property? This was an incident that took place in public, in the presence of lots of people. The police can be too funny.

What could have led the police shooting the father of three, Raheem Okanlawon, dead? His mother explained that there had been a tension in the community, over a chieftaincy title among the ruling houses. She stressed that this crisis culminated into sharp disagreement between the supporters of the "incumbent Oba" and the generality of the people as to observing the Salah celebration prayer at the community prayer ground together.

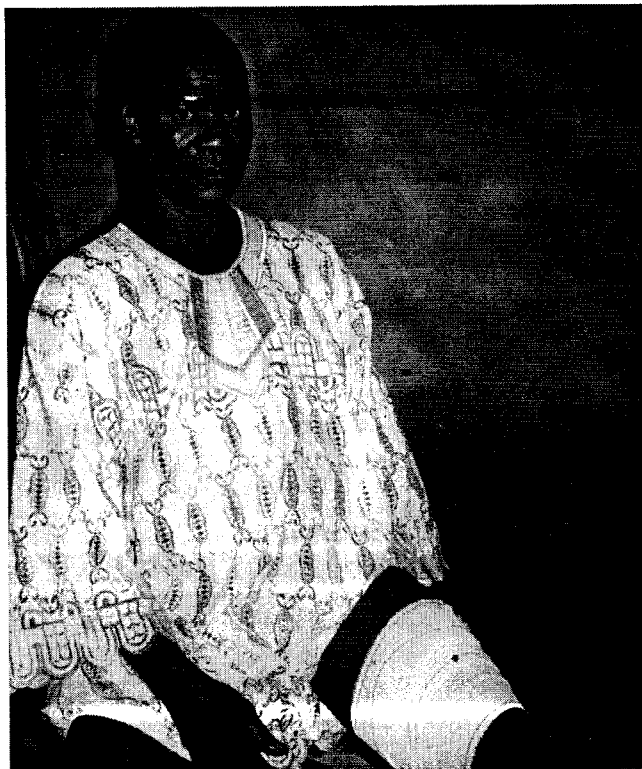
According to eyewitness account, who also fell victim of the police brutality but lucky to have escaped untimely death, Mr. Olu Babajide. "We were at the central mosque that fateful morning waiting for the arrival of Chief Imam of the town, who had gone to Ogbomosho with the Divisional police officer of Ikoyi Ile police station. Their mission there was to see the police Area Commander, under whose his jurisdiction Ikoyi Ile falls.

Prior to the day; the 45-year-old Babajide, who is a community youth leader explained further, there was tension in the land. And this was on the premise that the generality of the people had vowed not to recognise as the traditional head acclaimed Oba should he show up at the central praying ground on the Sallah day.

So, it was while the Muslims' faithful, who had gathered early enough at the central mosque, expecting the Chief Imam to return from his journey to Area Commander in Ogbomosho whether there would still be a joint prayer that some teenagers gathered tins together and began to beat and sing songs to commemorate the Salah celebration.

It was while this was on, *Daily Champion* further gathered, that some armed mobile policemen stormed the area and started firing tear gas cannister in peoples' direction with a view to dispersing them. But the people got infuriated over the police actions and presence, saying it was uncalled for, particularly as their being assembled was not to foment trouble but to celebrate *salah*.

Babajide, who is still recuperating from the excruciating pains resulting from the gun wound he sustained continued the narration. "Before we knew what was happening the police had started shooting sporadically. And in the process, the



• Olu Babarinde another victim



• Victim, Raheem Okanlawon, with wife

bullet hit Raheem on the head, and he fell down headlong. We rushed to find out if he could still survive, but the police threatened us with their guns. And as I wanted to carry him, I just heard "Pa", the bullet hit me on the thigh. I screamed and shouted ye, police have killed me".

At this point, there was nothing Babajide could do again. He had to abandon Raheem in the pool of his blood and run for his dear life.

That was all that Babajide knew. "From this point, I didn't know what happened next", said Babajide.

But investigations revealed that a neighbour, one Mr. Adebisi Abdulsalam also tried to rescue the victim, but he too, was brutalised by the police. He was said to have been hit on the head with gun butt and driven to the Area Commander in Ogbomosho, who ordered that he should be taken to the hospital for treatment.

Irrespective of what led to the killing of Raheem by the police, the family, particularly his mother, wants to know what happened to his body.

She has, however, taken the case before the Oyo State commissioner of Police, Mr. Jonathan Johnson.

"The police have killed my son. They have killed the family breadwinner, without just cause. Because my son was not a thief. He was not a criminal. He was only a victim of circumstance.

"But what is baffling me still, is despite the wrong killing, the police still took away his body and denied ever having a knowledge of the incident.

"Do you believe that when the commissioner of police called the DPO of Ikoyi Ile police station on phone in my presence, the man still denied having any knowledge of the incident", Madam Okanlawon noted and stressed that, "I don't know why he wants to cover an open incident. The incident happened in the presence of hundreds of people, yet he's still lying.

However, rather than the distraught mother getting set for a showdown with the police over the matter, the family said they're pleading with the police in Ikoyi Ile to release the body of their son.

"Whatever circumstances leading to the killing of my son by the police, I want them to tell me. I want to know, the people of Ikoyi Ile also want to know. And we want to know what happened to his body. Where did they deposit it.

"My son has a wife and three children. So, I want President Olusegun Obasanjo and the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero and all well meaning Nigerians to help me ask the DPO of Ikoyi Ile police station, who deployed his men to kill my son, where is my son's body.

"They should tell him to bring the body of my son wherever it's being deposited and release it to me for proper burial.

My son has a wife and three children. They're now with me at Kisi. They are kids and have since been asking the whereabouts of their father. And there would be a time they would ask of their father's grave", enthused, the aged mother.