

9 Okada riders die in detention

TOM MOSES, *Calabar*

NINE commercial motorcycle operators said to have been detained at the Afokang prisons in Cross River State have died.

The motorcyclists detained for violating the state commercial motorcycle operations registration law were said to have died as a result of congestion.

Mr. Idongesit Okon, younger brother to one of the deceased commercial motorcycle operators raised the alarm in a chat with the *Daily Champion* soon after visiting the Afokang Prisons custody to give food to his detained brother. Effiong said to have been arrested by the police since Tuesday, January 9, 2007.

According to Okon, upon arriving the prisons custody and fulfilling the procedures to enable him meet and present the food to his brother last Sunday, he was unnecessarily delayed and after about 30 minutes, he was told that he would not be allowed in to see his brother.

Okon said he was told the instruction from the top echelon of the prisons service was that nobody should be allowed into

the cell or custody for whatever reason.

While still waiting and apparently confused on how to send the food to his brother, Okon said a police van drove into the yard and within five minutes, three corpses were allegedly removed from the cell and loaded into the police van and driven away.

There and then, he said, he drew the conclusion that his brother must have been one of the corpses being driven away in the police van which registration number he unfortunately, forgot to record

Okon said that it was as he started wailing and becoming confrontational that one of the prisons officials told him that his brother died the previous night as a result of complicated health problems.

When our correspondent visited the Afokang Prisons to confirm the story, top officials of the service were said to be "too busy to attend to "the press now" and that he should call back later in the day.

But an insider who pleaded that his name should not be revealed said that at least, nine

of the commercial motor-cyclists detained in the prisons custody due to congestion of the various police cells in Calabar the state capital had died.

He said the commercial motor-cyclists could not endure the risky prison conditions especially as the cells were congested and died consequently.

The source noted that the death would not have occurred if they were allowed to be released on bail by the state government.

When our correspondent visited the office of the Cross River State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), ASP Tom Opene, he was said to be absent from office at the time and could therefore not react to the news of the death of the commercial motor-cyclists in police custody.

Meanwhile, an orderly to the PPRO, Mrs. Michael Samuel who later answered a telephone call to the police spokesman, said the information on the incident was yet to get to his boss. He confirmed that many commercial motor-cyclists had been arrested and detained at the various cells including the Afokang Prisons custody.