



## Kidnapped Nneamaka Ubani

**T**HE kidnapping of Miss Nneamaka Ubani, an undergraduate student at the Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, by unknown persons, at Onitsha, Anambra State, last July, is certainly one of the cases that qualify the criminal act as a commercial venture.

No doubt, kidnappings in the Niger Delta in the past were used to forcefully impress upon the Nigerian state the need to redress its attitude towards the development of that oil bearing region. The actors, most times, got public support, even though their actions were criminal in nature. Often, their victims were released without payment of ransom. However, recent developments indicate that those involved in the criminal act of kidnapping now emphatically demand ransom before releasing their victims, just as they have also adopted it for merchantile and other pecuniary purposes. Today, children and the elderly are routinely kidnapped with huge sums demanded as ransom. The trend has become gory and dangerous as the case of citizen Nneamaka Ubani shows.

Reports had it that the events that led to the kidnapping of the 17-year-old lady began in Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), Abuja office of Nneamaka's mother.

According to the report, Mrs. Ubani, the mother of Nneamaka a born-again Christian, was asked to bring out a contract project file without the authorization of her boss, and to process same for payment. Two of her colleagues allegedly made the demand on her, but on behalf of a contractor who is said to be a senior federal civil servant, also in Abuja.

When she was several times pressured and she refused to budge, her tormentors decided to teach her a lesson and her daughter, Nneamaka, was kidnapped.

A link has been established between the two employees of PHCN and those who kidnapped Nneamaka. This is because a text message sent to Mrs Ubani's cell phone threatened her for daring to "arrest our men" with the police. In deed, the police actually arrested the two PHCN personnel but later released them even when Nneamaka had not been freed by her captors.

Now, the latest message to Mrs Ubani is that her daughter is dead. They blamed her for being responsible for the sad event because she refused to cooperate and meet their demands.

The kidnappers had allegedly made three demands on Mrs Ubani. That she should resign from her job as secretary to the manager in charge of payments at the PHCN; that she should poison her boss and lastly, that she should pay a ransom of \$45,000 (N6 million). Mrs Ubani did not do any of the three and so, her daughter was said to have been killed.

The story appears to be like what happens in tales in the moonlight. Yet, it is happening in reality, making the society look like the medieval age where life is not only "short, nasty and brutish", but also for the "survival of the fittest." This should not be so in a modern state, not even in our country, where the rule of law is the hallmark of governance.

There is every reason to worry that the police did not do much in the past one and half months that Miss Ubani was kidnapped. Perhaps, if they had intervened, the outcome would have been different. Come to think of it, the \$45,000 ransom demanded by the kidnappers would have been collected by somebody or paid into an account. Are there no ways to track such things down? But perhaps, the worst aspect of police ineptitude in the matter was the release of the two PHCN officers who are known to be in alliance with the kidnappers, even when their victim is still held.

It must be restated that kidnapping is a criminal offence and has very stringent punishment in the country's statutes.

Accordingly, the police should go ahead and re-arrest the two officers of PHCN and conduct a thorough investigation into the kidnapping of Miss Ubani to establish their culpability or otherwise. And upon such investigation, prosecute them before a court of competent jurisdiction for the law to take its due course.

It is strange that this kind of insanity is happening in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria, where some individuals in their evil quest to amass wealth, would simply disregard other peoples principles and appreciation of life.

Indeed, the only way to prove to the Ubanis and Nigerians that honesty and due diligence still matter in the conduct of official business is for the police to unravel the mystery of those responsible for the kidnap (and subsequent killing?) of Nneamaka and to ensure that they are duly punished, if found guilty.