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**O**FORBUIKE Ogboji, 18, from Ukaba Development Centre in Onicha local government area of Ebonyi state, was a promising young man but now cut down prematurely in a most bizarre and mysterious manner.

At the centre of the sinister episode are his mother, Mary Ukpabi, step-father, Godwin Ukpabi and two others.

Around October 2nd or 3rd 2008, Oforbuike was reported missing. Four days later, his mutilated body was found in the bush. His throat was slashed open in a manner that goats are slaughtered, just as his head was roughly shaven and fishing net wrapped around his body.

Before his gruesome murder, Oforbuike was living with his mother and two other siblings in his step-father's house at Anyarigwe village.

The story had it that Oforbuike's mother, Mary, was initially married to Godwin Ukpabi but after the first issue, a boy called Ivo, she ceased to take in again for six years. The temporary infertility caused a quarrel and eventual separation from her husband.

She re-married a second husband, Ogboji of Achienyi, Ohaffia Ukawu. Ogboji married her as a second wife as he already had some children from his first wife. After several visitations to some hospitals and herbal homes, Mary took in for the second husband and had Oforbuike.

Two other siblings followed in quick succession. Some years later, Mary quarreled with the second husband, Ogboji, and went back to the first husband, taking with her the three children she had for Ogboji. According to the story, every attempt by Ogboji to retrieve his children proved abortive but he kept in touch with them and they knew him as their biological father.

Last year, Ogboji became sick and most of the grown up children from his first wife were not in town. It was Oforbuike, who had a herd of goat and engaged in other menial jobs that attended to him before the older half-brothers returned.

Their father later passed on, but the effort made by Oforbuike to save his life was not lost on his half brothers. As Oforbuike grew older, it became obvious that he wanted to go back to the family of his biological father. This quest didn't go down well with his step-father, who would always issue threats each time he noticed that Oforbuike went to his biological father for anything.

It was under this acrimonious relationship between Oforbuike and his step-father that he got missing. And when four days later his dead body was found in the bush, his step father did not waste time in burying the corpse.

But when the other half-brothers of Oforbuike heard about his death and the circumstances surrounding his burial, they came to Ukpabi and his wife, Oforbuike's mother, to inquire what really happened and why the corpse was not brought to his biological father's (Ogboji's) home as tradition demands. They could not get satisfactory answer.

It was at this juncture that Ogboji's children petitioned AIG zone six, Calabar, and the state commissioner of police. The matter was then referred to the police area command, Onueke in Ezza South local government area of Ebonyi state.

In the petition signed by Ogboji A. Ogboji and made available to *Saturday Champion*, the family expressed strong indication that their half-brother, Oforbuike, was murdered and appealed to the police to expose and bring the culprits to justice.

They particularly queried the manner the deceased was hurriedly buried without police permission and autopsy

# 18 year-old boy butchered!

## •Step-father, mother fingered



•The late Ogboji

report. The petitioner named some suspects, including Ukpabi, Mary, one Chief Elias Nwutobo and his security man.

Following police investigation, the four suspects were arrested and detained. They are currently helping the police in their investigation.

When our reporter contacted the state police public relations officer (PPRO), Chris Anyanwu, an assistant superintendent of

police (ASP) for comments, he confirmed the development, adding that the matter was being handled by the area commander at Onueke, Mr. Uwaezuoke Patrick, an assistant commissioner of police, who he said reports directly to the state commissioner of police, Kachi Udorji.

The PPRO however stated that based on his interaction with the area commander, he discovered that the

"case is a bad one" because the deceased was buried without the knowledge of the police, just as no autopsy was carried on the corpse to determine the cause of death.

Anyanwu opined that it would be difficult to conclude that the boy was murdered because the corpse was not seen to ascertain whether there was mark of injury or anything that could lead to suspicion of murder.

He however noted that the only option left to police was for a pathologist to exhume the body and carry out an autopsy. He confirmed that four suspects are in police custody in connection with the case and there was no intention to release them on bail.

Meanwhile, the case is now assuming a complex dimension. Based on new revelations, the area commander has invited 13 additional suspects for questioning. But at the same time the petitioner, Ogboji, has complained that he has been put under undue pressure by the police, who are demanding that he should quickly engage the services of a pathologist to carry out the exhumation of the body and autopsy, or the suspects would be released.

But to do this, he said, has not been easy for him because there are three pathologists in the state and the least price charged by one of them for the service is N450, 000.00, an amount he said would take the family some time to assemble considering the enormous financial strain the case has brought on them since it started.

The petitioner also reported that some police officers from Obiozara police division in Ohaozara local government are trying to confuse him by claiming that they had carried autopsy when in actual fact they did not do so.

Ogboji said that the chief suspect in the case, Ukpabi, in his statement to police, said he initially reported the death to Obiozara police division before burying the corpse. But the petitioner added however that there was no report to prove the assertion. He further contended that Ukaba development centre, where the incident took place, is within the jurisdiction of Isu police division in Onicha local government and not Ohaozara.

Ogboji expressed fear that he might not get justice in the matter because some of the suspects are powerful people with means and that they have already assembled lawyers. He said he has already lodged a complaint with the Human Right Centre, Abakiliki.

When our reporter visited the centre, an official, who craved anonymity, said the centre has received the report and is monitoring the way police would handle the case. The official stated that it is not the duty of the petitioner to pay for the autopsy, but that of the police, since it is a murder case and a crime against the state.

Also when contacted, a legal practitioner based in Afikpo, Ebonyi state, Oko Nnachi noted that in Nigeria, the police would usually demand the petitioner to pay for the autopsy, but in actual fact, it is the duty of the police to pay for it as part of their investigation.

When contacted again on whether it was the responsibility of the petitioner, somebody who reported a crime of murder to pay for the autopsy, the PPRO parried the question. According to Anyanwu, in developed countries "where there are normal procedures" the petitioner has no business with autopsy once the matter is reported.

The police, he said, would go the extra mile to carry out forensic investigations, including autopsy to ascertain cause of death because they wouldn't want anybody to dilute or compromise the evidence or investigation. But in Nigeria, he said the matter is complex.

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