

Murdered lecturer: Group faults Rivers on security

DENNIS NAKU, Port Harcourt

•Wants public security debate, probe

THE Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL), yesterday, condemned the recent assassination of a legal practitioner and lecturer with the Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST), Mr. Joseph Pango, saying the incident makes nonsense of the huge funds spent on security by the Governor Chibuike Amaechi-led administration.

Also, the body called on the state government to urgently convene a public security debate in order to come up with a well articulated security policy in Rivers State, which it said, was long overdue, just as it stressed the need for a public inquiry into the reason so much funds were spent on security, yet the people live in constant fear across the state.

But the Chief Press Secretary to Rivers State Governor, Mr. Blessing Wikina, who reacted on the issue in telephone chat with *Saturday Champion*, said claims by the rights group were false, just as he branded the institute "a fraud."

Wikina, who also doubted the credibility of the body, quickly added that "it only survives on cheap popularity."

However, a statement issued, yesterday, in Port Harcourt and signed by the institute's programme officer, Peace Building and Conflict Transformation, Mr. Chigozirim

Okocha, noted with sadness that such wanton killings have become a weekly occurrence there.

The statement reads in part, "The IHRHL has received with immense sadness the slaughter of Mr. Joseph Pango, lecturer in the Faculty of Law, Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Nkpolu, Port Harcourt on Wednesday, November 3, 2011. His body was found lifeless in his Toyota car at Barobara, near Kira-Tai bush path between Tai local government area in Ogoni Kingdom and Oyigbo local government area, Rivers State.

"Late Pango was known to have indicated willingness as candidate for the chairmanship of Gbikana local government area, in Ogoni land," the statement further said.

The IHRHL regarded the slaughtering of Citizen Pango as a major setback to the confidence and trust that civil society agents are trying to restore following the "incredible apathy that has resulted from the 'eleven locust' years of PDP administration of political violence, absence of participatory democracy, bad governance that has made sustainable livelihood of citizens and others absolutely impossible."

The rights group noted that the latest murder, added to the almost weekly figures of killings in the face of

Governor Chibuike Amaechi's claim to have spent huge amount of money on security matters, including those on the Joint Task Force (JTF), and other security apparatus, made the whole issue sound like wild goose chase and is laughable.

On his Israeli security consultants, the body questioned the level of transparency and honesty in these public expenditures, and called for a public inquiry that would explain why so much would be invested and yet the "citizens live in absolute fear, day and night, and are recklessly slaughtered."

IHRHL further urged the government of Rivers State "to urgently call for an all embracing critical public security debate forum in the State for purposes of finally unmasking how the State has been operating since the inception of democracy in May 1999, as well as to ascertain how seeds of violence were sown in the state by certain people just to further their political ambitions."

Appealing to the people to always be on the alert, the rights group said, "In the final analysis, their outrage and power shall become the needed solution in the face of deliberate state policy to oppress and reduce them to mere ants in the midst of abundance."