

# Murder of 3 teenagers

## 10 vigilance men suspects for trial

By STEVE OKO, Umuahia

**M**EMBERS of the "Eyes Open Day and Night Vigilante" in Amanmiri village of Ihechiowa in Arochuku LGA of Abia state, who last week allegedly killed and buried three suspected teenage cultists will this week be arraigned in court to face murder charges.

According to police sources, all 10 suspects now cooling their heels at the state Criminal Investigation Department (CID) police cell in Umuahia will be charged for conspiracy and murder.

Trouble started when three teenagers, Uchenna John, a 16 year old primary school pupil; Justin Kalu; and Uchenna Robert, a bus conductor, all 16, suddenly disappeared on September 19, 2010.

Efforts by their relations to locate their whereabouts failed until October 10, 2010, when it was discovered they had been murdered by overzealous local vigilante group in a barbaric and primitive jungle justice.

According to reports, they were allegedly caught in the bush engaging in cult activities following a report that they had been initiating other boys into money doubling and gambling cult.

After trial at the village square, the victim were therefore, handed over to the vigilante group for onward transfer to the police, but unfortunately, the wicked vigilante without the consent of the villagers rather decided to execute the on the way.

They were all buried in about four feet grave-like hole with the heads down, feet up, and hands tied behind them while their bodies were riddled with machete cuts.

It was also alleged that the vigilante had also arrested other boys along with the victims including the son of one of the suspects but later freed them after collecting N3000 graft while they decided to execute the wretched victims who could not raise the N3000 illegal bail out fee before they ran out of patience.

The wicked act of the vigilante group had already attracted strong condemnation and wrath of the youths of the community who quickly mobilized and demolished their house setting all their belongings ablaze.

Meanwhile, the exhumed decomposing bodies of the victims have been deposited at the Arochuku General Hospital where autopsy report is being awaited before prosecuting the suspects according to police source.

Speaking with Sunday Champion on the incident, the Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) in charge of state CID, Mr. Joseph Micloth, who strongly condemned the barbarity remarked that vigilante groups are only to assist the police and not to execute suspects.

According to him, neighbourhood watch associations should not operate independent of the police, and when they make any arrest, should immediately hand them over to the police who have the professional training to prosecute them after thorough investigations.

"The moment they want to go on their own way because of their deficiency in training, they are more likely to make mistakes," he said.

Mr. Micloth, however, does not subscribe to the agitations in certain quarters that local vigilante groups be proscribed entirely because of allegations of rampant cases of extra judicial killings and jungle justices leveled against them in recent times. He rather believes that they should be re-branded and members regularly screened with a view to weeding out black legs among them as their services remain inevitably sacrosanct especially in this era of community policing.

"I do not think proscription is the solution. We are in the era of community policing, and community policing is all about police partnering with the community because we are not spirits. We cannot work in isolation. We have to work with the community, and the vigilante seems to represent the community at the local level.

"The best is to re-orientate them, and it calls for more supervision so that people who are engaged as vigilante should be respectable people in community. They must partner with police at all times, but talking about proscription is like throwing away the baby with the birth water. That I think will not be

appropriate," he subscribed.

Special Adviser to Gov. Theodore Orji on Special Duties, Chief Ukpai Agwu Ukpai who while commenting on the recent killing of an innocent passer-by at Ehere market, Aba, by a member of AVS said to be having altercations with a lorry driver at the time of the incident, said the advantages of the vigilante groups far out way any demerit associated with the group.

He explained that the Aba tragedy was as a result of accidental discharge as the victim never had any problem with the AVS, adding however, that the police are currently investigating the matter.

Chief Ukpai said that the call for proscription of the vigilante groups is unnecessary considering their essential services in the security of the state.

"You know police men are strangers but the members of the vigilante services are indigenes who understand the geographical terrain of their local environments. As indigenes also they can easily identify criminals. So, they should be allowed to exist along side with the police because of these many advantages".

He however, acknowledged the existence of some bad eggs who infiltrated the AVS but said government had commenced re-screening of the members of the AVS to weed out undesirable elements in their midst.

"I can assure you now that the police have began the screening of all members of AVS and all those found unfit will be dropped, but empowered so they will not constitute nuisance to the society," he said.

He, therefore, appealed to the public to be patient with government as the AVS is being re-branded to reposition them for efficient services more so now that Christmas season is around the corner with its attendant rise in crime wave.

He dispelled the rumour making the rounds that government may have been using the security outfit for ulterior motives and asked the public to disregard such speculations which he said were the antics of detractors and the opposition.

"AVS is not even the creation of this administration. It has been in existence before this government came on board, so, the argument that government uses it for any ulterior purpose is baseless and should be disregarded.

"Those calling for the proscription of AVS are the people who are not happy with the liberation we have gotten in the state. They have also started calling on the army to leave Aba when others are rejoicing at the restoration of peace at the city. They want to return the state to the dark days of criminality."

Commenting on the issue, the Chairman, Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), Umuahia branch, Barrister Amanze Chioma, said it is an aberration for vigilante groups to take laws into their hands by executing suspects when they are not constitutionally allowed to do so.

"If they resort to jungle justice, their existence is not justifiable," he said, adding that they should not operate independent of police.

He advised members of vigilante groups not to use their membership as a ploy to maim their perceived opponents.

Meanwhile, Sunday Champion investigations reveal that mixed reactions have continued to trail the activities and the desirability or otherwise of vigilante groups in Abia state.

While some believe that they should be allowed to continue to operate along side other conventional security agencies as complements, some others say they are not quite doing enough considering the rampant incidents of criminal activities that pass under their nose.

Criminality particularly kidnapping and robbery almost got to its crescendo in Abia state despite the heavy presence of security agencies including the vigilante groups before the recent deployment of soldiers who have in less than one month of their operations almost rid the state of hoodlums.

It is however obvious that the vigilante groups may not have acquired any form of formal training on security and importantly the use of gun, and need to be properly oriented as well as equipped for better performances as they themselves have sometimes become

targets by men of the underworld.

Therefore, it is important that government should ensure all vigilante groups in the state attend regular paramilitary trainings and security courses to enhance their performances.

Importantly too, senior police or military officers should be attached to the various vigilante groups to supervise their operations while steps should also be taken to properly equip them so as not to be vulnerable to attacks by criminals.

They should also be adequately remunerated to avoid their involvement in some odd jobs so as to make ends meet.

Again, regular screening of members of

the vigilante groups should be taken seriously by government while community and religious leaders must also be involved during recruitments to avoid lions in sheep clothing infiltrating their ranks.

It is also imperative to note at this juncture, that for vigilante groups to live up to their responsibilities in Nigeria, they should be made to expunge the erroneous and primitive belief that their success depends much on African magic instead of expertise.

It is high time they be made to depend on professionalism for efficiency as obtains in the western world than the unreliable superstition which history has proved never paid off any time.



The remains of the three teenagers

## Imo set for Ahiajoku festival

**T**HE annual Ahiajoku Festival, the Tgbo forum for intellectual harvest and cultural renaissance, is set to be held in Owerri, the Imo State Capital.

According to a statement by the Imo State Commissioner for Culture and Tourism, Amanze Obi, the festival will hold between 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>

November, 2010, with the theme: "Nigeria's Leadership Challenges in the 21 Century: The Igbo perspective."

The lecture will be delivered by an erudite scholar, Professor Chinedu O. Nebo, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Nigeria and Vice Chancellor Emeritus.

A major highlight of this year's festival, according to Dr. Obi, is that it will be spiced with a lot of intellectual and cultural activities. The festival will begin with colloquium which parades a number of egg-heads from the academic community within and outside the country. It will hold alongside an art exhibition. The colloquium papers will, like the lecture, draw from the theme of this year's festival.

There is also the cultural angle to the event featuring a cultural night which will showcase the many cultural features that make Imo State a major cultural and tourism haven of the nation.

According to Dr. Obi, Ahiajoku lecture, under Governor Ikedi Ohakim, has been rebranded in line with the new thinking of the administration.

Part of the statement reads:

"After nearly three decades of the Ahiajoku Lecture series, the Government of Chief Ikedi Ohakim, in its innovative drive, saw reason to

give the festival a new face. The new thinking was borne out of the fact that the series had, over the years, largely dwelt on history and the culture of the Igbo people. Nearly 30 years after, it was thought that enough story about who the Igbo are and what their values are had been well received. It was therefore, considered germane for the lectures to begin to explore other areas of interest."

"Thus, the Government had to incorporate this new thinking in his rebranding philosophy. The focus now is for Ahiajoku to dwell on practical issues of development. The tendency is for the lectures to touch on issues that are of immediate relevance to the improvement of the lot of the Igbo nation.

Dr. Obi said that it was for this reason that Chinua Achebe, the world renowned scholar and foremost African Novelist, was invited in 2008 to espouse on this new thinking. His lecture dwelt on the all important issue of unity among the Igbo. It was delivered in January 2009.

This was closely followed in November 2009 by Prof. Barth Nnaji, the

Robotics Engineer who dwelt on the issue of energy crisis in Nigeria with particular reference to Igboland.

The lecture will be chaired by another renowned Professor - G.M. Umezurike, former Vice Chancellor of Abia State University and 1992 Ahiajoku Lecturer.

Indeed, an array of scholars from diverse fields will play prominent roles during the festival. The overall objective is for the Igbo to come together and reflect on how best they can survive as a people in a changing world.