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Tension in Kogi community after police/vigilante killed 3 youths

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The killing of three youths in Ikanekpo village in Ankpa local government of Kogi State on April 3, 2010 by a team of policemen and a vigilante group, has created tension in the area, as the community's leaders are angry over what they termed extrajudicial killing of young men returning from a marriage ceremony.

"The youths that who arrested unarmed but later killed by the patrol team as alleged armed robbers," said a retired Assistant Superintendent of Police, Gabriel Oketa, who is a community leader in the area.

"As a small community, we know everyone and I, and the rest of the elders here can vouch for these youths. They are not armed robbers as the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) told us," said Oketa, who gave the names of the youths as Messrs Benard Oche, Rabiu Musa and Abdul Akpasnufa, all in their late teens.

According to the community, the youths were law abiding citizens who had lived peacefully without showing any signs of criminal behaviour. He claimed "they were invited to a wedding ceremony and, on their way back on a motorcycle, they were arrested. The patrol team passed our village with the youths along with their motorcycle in their van before the eyes of all, but few minutes later we heard gunshots."

A petition signed by Oketa on behalf of the community to Shaibu Ogbu & Co which was obtained by Sunday Trust states, "the latest of these extra-judicial killings, was on the 3rd of April 2009. Before then, the community alleged that "we have been tormented by the 'KAKE," as the group of police and vigilante is called in the area."

According to Oketa, "the annoying thing was that the patrol team passed through our village with the suspects but about two kilometres after our village, they shot and killed all three and took their corpses to Ankpa."

He added that it took frantic efforts of the elders to pacify the youths to stay calm. The Ikanekpo community stated in a petition, a copy of which was made available to Sunday Trust that they were not in support of criminality and demanded why the patrol team known as KAKE should be empowered by the police to kill people. "Even if the young men were armed robbers, they should have been tried by a competent court of law," said Barrister Ogbu.

When our reporter contacted the Kogi state Police command for comments, the Police Public Relations Officer, Abubakar Nasiru Mohammed, said that he could not comment on the issue, saying, "I cannot know what is happening everywhere in the state until I am briefed," he said.

Apparently, the immediate family and community are determined to follow the course of justice, not only to clear the names of the victims, but to seek "adequate compensation and an apology from the police for their families," said Oketa.

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