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'I watched as Customs officer shot my cousin'

By Rakiya A. Muhammad | Publish Date: Mar 6 2016 5:00AM

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The deceased, Shu'aibu Lawali, Nura Bello, driving with the deceased when he was killed and The deceased's father, Mallam Lawali Ahmadu

It has been a terrible time for the family of a 25-year-old Shu'aibu Lawali who was allegedly shot dead by an officer of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS). The incident happened last week at Asara village, along the Gwadabawa-Ilela road in Sokoto.

The gory picture of the deceased had gone viral on the social media, even as the incident was a subject of discussion at Gwadabawa town

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where the late Lawali lived with his parents. The incident happened barely two months to his marriage, it was gathered.

Family members, friends and colleagues have continued to pay tribute to the late Lawali, a commercial vehicle driver, who was said to be in the company of his cousin, Nura Bello, when the incident occurred. Recounting the ordeal, Bello said, "We were travelling from Illela to Gwadabawa where we were expected to join a political campaign group. That was why we were moving at a reasonable speed.

"On reaching the Customs checkpoint at Asara village, Gwadabawa Local Government Area, the Customs officers on duty pursued us to a military checkpoint along the same road.

"The Customs officers ordered us to stop and turn back to their checkpoint. I refused their request and they shot at our tyre. Their boss went directly to the driver's side where Shuaibu was winding the glass down to talk to them.

"The Customs boss threatened to shoot my cousin. At this juncture, I cried for help from other motorists and people at the military checkpoint to intervene and save us from further harassment. He went straight to the driver and aimed at him, but his colleagues (about six of them) pleaded with him not to shoot.

"As I bent down to check our damaged tyre, I heard the sound of the gun that terminated my cousin's life. He was shot in the eye, and he died on the spot."

Bello alleged that immediately Lawali was shot, all the Customs operatives, including their boss who fired the gun, fled the scene.

"The military personnel around that area chased them, but they disappeared into the bush," he recalled.

On why they refused to obey the order to stop, Bello said: "There were over 300 people on that road, and we were not carrying any contraband in the vehicle. We were only carrying two sacks of rice meant for my late cousin's boss, who always sent him to buy rice for his family, at least once or twice in a month.

"We just wanted to beat the local government convoy which usually blocks the road during such occasions.

"Going to Illela is our weekly routine; we don't engage in smuggling activities. It seems the Customs officers had a score to settle with the deceased, who on several occasions defied their threat to arrest and deal with him. From all indications, they were looking for a day to deal with my cousin after he defied many of them," he said.

He described his late cousin, who had plied his trade as a commercial vehicle driver for 10 years, as easygoing, coolheaded, peace-loving and caring.



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"He never fought with anyone, even as a regular transporter on the Illela-Gwadabawa road. He was popular among his colleagues and officers manning different checkpoints on the busy road. We were together on several of such trips."

Speaking with our reporter in his house in the midst of many sympathisers, Shuaibu's father, Mallam Lawali Ahmadu, could not hold back tears.

"I was informed that a driver was shot by Customs officers along the Gwadabawa-Illela road. The story started to change when some of my relatives learnt from reliable sources that he was actually my son, Shuaibu. I dressed up to go out and confirm the stories making the round when some of my family members came back home sobbing and others looking sad. They asked me not to go out, saying I should wait for further development on the issue.

"As I was sitting down, I heard siren and I was told that it was the corpse of the late Shu'aibu being conveyed to Sokoto for investigation. His corpse was later released to us for burial. It was a horrific sight as his eye was blown out by bullets and his body drenched in blood," he recounted.

Ahmadu described his late son as good, caring and peace-loving, adding, "He hardly complained about the regular assistance he rendered to people."

On whether he had complained of having problems with anyone, he replied: "He never reported to us that he had problems with Customs officers. But I can remember that one day, the same Customs officers at Asare checkpoint took him to the Army at one of their checkpoints and gave him the beating of his life until he became unconscious. The same Customs officers at the Asare checkpoint are now the people who caused his death."

Insisting that justice must be done on the murder of his son, he said, "The killer of my son should be made to face the full wrath of the law. My son was not a criminal and he did nothing wrong to deserve such cruel treatment."

But the Area Comptroller of Customs in charge of Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara states, Sani Madugu, said it was a regrettable accidental discharge. He noted that there was a clash between smugglers and men of the NCS along the Gwadabawa road; hence the accidental discharge that led to the death of Lawali.

He said that all Customs officers within the vicinity had been arrested and handed over to the police for further investigation.

The Commissioner of Police in Sokoto State, Alhaji Salisu Fagge, confirmed that the police had detained some Customs officers, adding that a total of eight officers were on duty at the affected location, and

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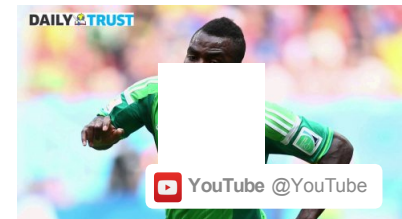


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