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Brutality by uniformed men: 36 killed, 34 injured in 5 months

By Fidelis Mac-Leva and Haruna Ibrahim | Publish Date: May 22 2016 5:00AM

Nigeria appears to have become one huge killing field of defenseless citizens; and the killing machine is made up of uniformed men comprising the Nigeria Police, military and other gun wielding security operatives who think it is no big deal shooting and killing the same people they are paid to protect.

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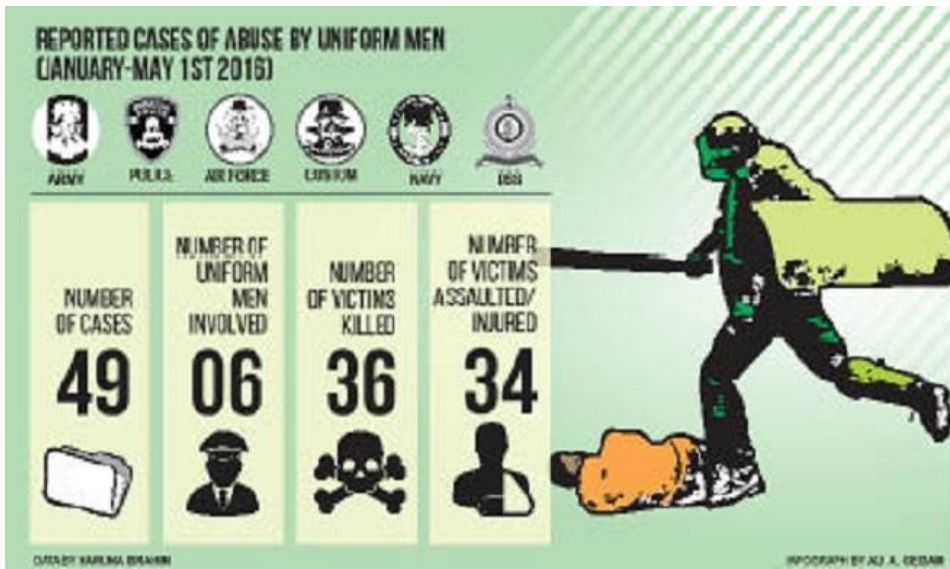
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They were all dressed in black, carrying a coffin covered with palm fronds as they marched in protest over a piece of land that was said to have been claimed by an oil community. The land had been a source of recurring communal dispute between two communities in Edo and Delta states in South-South Nigeria. But little did these protesting women of Eku-Ethiope East community of Delta State realize that their innocent actions would be met with military brutality.

The protesting women stood their ground when asked to return to their homes, insisting that they want to be addressed by a representative of the oil company; a development that angered the Army unit commander in charge of Ovre-Eku community in Delta State who reportedly ordered his men to flog the protesting women.



There was stampede as the women were kicked and flogged by the soldiers. Wives, mothers and grandmothers took to their heels but the elderly women who could not run fast enough fell and were trampled on by the soldiers.

Justifying their action, the Army reportedly said the protesters had tried to disarm their officers.

To many observers, it was rather difficult to picture an elderly woman trying to disarm fierce looking, skillfully trained soldiers but the incident at Ovre-Eku community in Delta state which occurred in March this year is just one of the several cases of brutality unleashed on innocent Nigerians by uniformed men.

The Bad

On March 5, 2016, the District Head of Gulak in Madagali Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Alhaji Muhammadu Bello Injadi,



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court tells Okonjo-Iweala



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also tasted the bitter pill of military brutality as he was said to have been physically assaulted by some soldiers in Gulak town. The traditional ruler was said to have become a victim of military brutality simply for trying to dissuade them from constant harassment of civilians that had been going on for some time in most of the communities liberated from the Boko Haram in the North-East. The assault on the District Head reportedly occurred on the fateful day when some soldiers were said to be molesting some civilians an hour before the official curfew that had been imposed in the area. The development was said to have attracted the attention of the traditional ruler who pleaded with the soldiers to exercise restraint. But rather than reasoned with him the soldiers reportedly pounced on the traditional ruler, kicking him and beating him black and blue. The development was said to have angered his subjects who rose in protest. Ironically, it was the District Head himself who along with other community elders calmed down frayed nerves. One of the most recently reported cases of brutality was that allegedly meted out to a Nigerian female lawmaker in Abuja. For overtaking the convoy of the Comptroller-General of the Nigeria Prisons, Dr. Peter Ezenwa Ekipendu, within the premises of the National Assembly on April 20, a female lawmaker, Hon. Onyemeachi Mprakpor, was allegedly beaten by security operatives attached to the official. Mkrakpor who represents Aniocha/Oshimili Federal constituency of Delta State, was said to be driving out of the National Assembly when she made to overtake the convoy of the Prisons boss.

the deadly

The protesting women in Delta State, the Gulak community leader and the female lawmaker are among the few lucky victims who survived to tell their stories. Other victims of brutality by uniformed men were killed in the process.

Arinze Daniel, a 35-year-old man was one of the unlucky victims who were shot dead by a policeman in Lagos on February 8, 2016. At about 9pm on the fateful day, Daniel who had been newly married was said to have been on his way back from work when he was stopped by policemen at a checkpoint who asked him where he was coming from. He reportedly told them he was on his way home from work. But as he was about to bring out his identity card as demanded by them, one of the policemen brought out a gun and shot him.

Although Daniel's friend in the bus he was driving, reportedly rushed to the nearby Onireke Police Division to report the matter, the three policemen at the checkpoint allegedly fled before policemen from the division could get there.

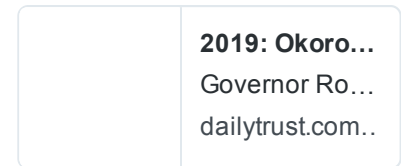
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A similar fate befell one Taye Akande, a 45-year-old who was reportedly shot dead by a police officer, Sergeant Ologuowa Ojo, for allegedly sitting on the fence of the company he (Ojo), posted as security detail.

The sad incident reportedly happened on February 3, 2016, at Frajend Investments Nigeria Limited, located at Akodo, Shapati area of Elemo Ajah in the Lagos Island, where Ojo served as a guard. The victim had allegedly refused to get down from the fence when Ojo told him to, prompting the trigger happy officer to shoot him in the buttock-and he later died.

The incidents cited above are just few among several cases of brutality meted out to Nigerians by uniformed men between January and May this year. A survey carried out by Daily Trust on Sunday shows that no fewer than 49 cases of brutality by uniformed men were reported within the period under review.

Out of this figure, 36 victims were killed in different parts of the country, while 34 others sustained various degrees of injuries, arising from assaults by uniformed men. Security personnel that perpetrated these acts of brutality are made up of the Army, the police, Air Force, Customs, Prison Service Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corpse (NSCDC), Navy, as well as men of the State Security Service (SSS). Lagos State in the South-West Nigeria recorded the highest number of cases of brutality by uniformed men within the period under review. The state recorded 16 cases, leading to about 10 deaths while several other victims sustained various degrees of injuries arising from cases of brutality.

Ogun State, also located in the South-West recorded the second highest number of cases, amounting to 10 incidents with 5 deaths and many other victims with various degrees of injuries.

Other states where cases of brutality by uniformed men were reported within the period under review are: Abia, Ondo, Gombe, Sokoto, Kebbi, Adamawa, Oyo, Plateau, Kaduna, Anambra, Edo, Rivers, Cross Rivers, Delta and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. But cases of brutality by uniformed men in Nigeria have been a yearly recurring decimal that had attracted concerns from many, including human rights activists. **In September 2011, three policemen stormed a funeral in Akoko community, Ndokwa West Local Government of Delta State, uninvited. Before they left the venue, they had killed three persons. One of the policemen was said to have been drunk and violated the conditions under which firearms could be used.**

In the same month, the mood of joy that had pervaded a social function on Joseph Akpoko Street, Udi-side, Enugu was turned to gloom when men of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), stormed



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the occasion and began shooting sporadically, killing one person and wounding two others. One of the victims, identified as Chineme Ede, 15, was allegedly killed instantly by the squad.

Another extra-judicial killing by the police that had sparked so much outrage was that which involved one Emmanuel Victor, 25, an indigene of Opubo Nkoro, in Opobo-Nkoro Local Government in Rivers State. He had left home for his Church, Christ Embassy, off Sani Abacha Road, Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital, on Sunday 16 October 2011, with his mother.

A diploma graduate from the Federal College of Education Kano, Victor was reportedly shot several times at close range by three trigger-happy policemen for daring to challenge them for extorting money from commercial motorcycle riders at a checkpoint very close to the entrance to his Church.

However, the three policemen who were arrested on the orders of the then Bayelsa State Police Commissioner, Mr Hillary Okpara, reportedly claimed they saw Victor smoking Indian hemp and when accosted, he used scissors to attack them so they shot at him in self-defence.

Following the brutal killing of four students of the Nasarawa State University, Keffi in February 2013, the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) had issued a statement condemning the act.

“We are shocked at this barbaric action of the university authorities, especially deploying military officers to employ the use of excessive force to quell civil protest by armless students”, the statement by the CLO has read, recalling that similar event had occurred in Ebonyi State that year (2013) students of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, protested against over 300 percent increase in tuition and service fees by the university authorities in which CLO vehemently condemned the wickedness and called on the state government to investigate the crisis and bring culprits to book.

In January 2014, the Northern Elders Forum (NEF) had threatened to drag a former Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Azubuike Ihejirika, and some other top military officers to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague for alleged extra-judicial killings.

The NEF had in a communiqué signed by its spokesman, Professor Ango Abdullahi, at the end of its meeting in Kaduna, accused the Army Chief and six others of extra-judicial killings of civilians by soldiers in Bama and Giwa barracks in Borno State using underground detention camps.

Apparently worried by the trend, the House of Representatives had in July last year tasked the Federal Government to reopen investigations into cases of extra-judicial killings and other high-profile murders

alleged to have been committed by police officers and personnel of other security agencies. Among such cases were the Apo 6 and the alleged invasion of Ogoni land by mobile policemen and armed soldiers.

In a motion raised on the floor of the House soliciting legislative support for the call for justice by Nigerians, a lawmaker, Kingsley Chinda, had said the efforts of successive administrations to tackle extra-judicial killings have been ineffective, hence the House urged the Nigeria Police to be more alive to its responsibilities in the prevention and proper investigation of crimes.

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