

IMPUNITY WATCH

How 'motorcycle theft' led to man's death in police custody

The family of Hassan Abdullahi is yet to come to terms with his death in police detention over alleged theft of a motorcycle. They are now seeking justice.

From Shehu Umar, Gusau

The family of a 23-year-old Hassan Abdullahi who allegedly died in police custody in Zamfara State said they would seek for justice over the death of their son.

The brother of the deceased, Nura Abdullahi, told *Daily Trust* on Sunday that his brother was arrested and tortured to death by the police in Gummi Local Government Area for an offence he did not commit.

"What happened was that last year, Hassan's friend, Saidu stole a motorbike and rode it to Argungu in the neighbouring Kebbi State. When he arrived he met Hassan there. He told my brother that he wanted to sell the bike and my brother brought a buyer. Unknown to him that the bike was stolen," he said.

"The bike was then sold off unknown to Saidu that he was seen by a resident when he was riding the bike out of Gummi town. So when he came back he was arrested and detained by the police alongside my brother.

"The case was then resolved after the stolen motorbike was retrieved and a certain amount of money was paid by the buyer of the motor bike and they were set free. But a year later, just two weeks ago, Hassan was re-arrested and beaten by the police.

"When the case was resolved earlier, Hassan left town and didn't come back until a year later. When he arrived Gummi, one of his friends informed the police



■ The victim, Hassan Abdullahi, in black kaftan

that he was back and had paid a visit to the local government secretariat."

Nura told *Daily Trust* on Sunday that Hassan's friend allegedly connived with the police and he was re-arrested at Gummi Local Government Area secretariat premises where he had gone for a transaction.

"They started beating him

right from there. They handcuffed him, bundled him into a waiting vehicle and moved to the police station where was continuously beaten.

"When the police realized the magnitude and consequence of their action, they decided to rush him to a hospital after they noticed a white fume gushing out from his nostrils and mouth.

"He died a day after, his corpse was deposited at the medical facility in Gummi. And preliminary investigation revealed that he had some internal injuries as a result of the beating," he added.

Nura further explained that they are preparing a petition against the police and their stand would be known as soon as the autopsy report was completed.

However, the Nura's family is not alone in the matter. The chairman of a Non-Governmental Organization called "Voice of the Masses" Mallam Garba Bala told our correspondent that they are documenting all available evidence that would help them secure a diligent and successful prosecution.

"I was at the station when the victim was brought by the police. His hands were held back, tied and handcuffed. They gave him a serious beating and within 24 hours he died," Bala said.

According to him "Police have been subjecting civilians here to torture. We have a case of one person here who was asked to chew paper as bread and many more others.

"The family of the deceased is under intense pressure to withdraw the case. The father of the victim is being intensively lobbied to give in. But even if he drops the case, we will continue with our process to ensure that justice is done on the matter," he said.

The Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) in Zamfara State, Barrister Bello Galadi said he was aware of the matter but was yet to receive any formal document on it.

"We can't comment on the matter until we receive a formal petition on the case from the family. This would give us a true picture of the case and then prepare on how to go about it," Galadi explained.

But, the spokesman of the Zamfara State Police Command, DSP Muhammad Shehu, denied that the police killed the victim, saying that Hassan was arrested because he was a wanted criminal.

"The police then discovered that he was ill and took him to the hospital, where he died. We don't torture civilians, it is not our tradition and it is against our rules of engagement," he added.

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■ Zamfara State Commissioner of Police, Shaba Alkali

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