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Monday, September 30, 2019

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How quest for missing persons unearthed mass graves in Benue

By Hope Abah Emmanuel, Makurdi | Published Date Sep 28, 2019 6:47 AM



Government officials and security operatives at the location of the graves

It was an unpleasant experience for the people of Gbatse community in Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State few days ago following the discovery of secret graves of murdered victims of a kidnap syndicate in the vicinity.

Sadly, the peaceful ambience of the community known for its agrarian prowess was momentarily shattered as the development caused a stir, occasioned by a crowd which besieged the area to witness the ugly episode.

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Locals told our correspondent earlier that 30 corpses were exhumed from the mass graves after the arrest which blew the lid off the unlawful act perpetrated by the gang leader Iorwuese Kpila and his cohorts.

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But, the police however confirmed 16 mass graves and the exhumation of 11 corpses by crack operatives from the state's command.

Sequel to the discovery, it was gathered that the district head (Tyoor) of Mbagwaza, Chief Julius Kpenkpen, had held a meeting with his Mbayegh counterpart, Chief Nathaniel Hoyo, informing him that two commercial motorcyclists (okada riders) from his jurisdiction were missing.

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To this end, Hoyo summoned a meeting of leaders of the two communities alongside their subjects to take an oath using 'Swem' (the Tiv ancestral deity) basically to unearth the truth, as at this time complaints of missing persons in the area had become worrisome.

It was learnt that robbery, kidnapping and killings had become the order of the day, leaving residents in fear about their movement while doing their legitimate businesses.

Daily Trust Saturday gathered that both elders and youths in the area participated in the oath taking and agreed that any member of their families involved in such dastardly activities be exposed, arrested, or killed by Swem. ^{close} ^{close}

Three weeks later, the stakeholders were said to have converged again and demanded that the family of the ring leader, Kpila, should produce him.

However, the suspect showed up on his own on Monday, September 21, 2019 at the residence of Chief Hoyo who handed him and four other accomplices to the police for further investigation during which they confessed to several killings and burial of their numerous victims in shallow graves.

Some families were said to have identified their missing relatives while the police exhumed the dead bodies from graves found within the premises of the lead suspect.

A Facebook user, Moses Fehger, wrote, "My cousin was killed after money was collected by these devil incarnates," with a photo of the deceased posted on the wall.

Another user recalled that, "I brought a report on this platform on my missing cousin, Mr. Iorhemba Asongo Jev, popularly known as Orbiggy. I told you his last known movement was when he picked two passengers from Adikpo to Usongo and never returned since then."

Meanwhile, the Benue State police command on Friday paraded the seven suspects as serial killers, armed robbers and kidnappers.

State Commissioner of Police, Mukaddas Garba, said "During interrogation, the suspects confessed that they have been armed robbers operating within zone Ukum, Kwande, Kastina-Ala and Ushongo LGAs who opted for kidnapping as a result of tight deployment of security operatives on the highways," he said.

Speaking with journalists, the gang leader, Kpila, popularly known as 'Doctor', admitted that his gang killed 16 people within three months.

The 30-year-old married with four wives and four children, also confessed that the killings were means to acquire powers from a spirit being referred to as queen mother and that he was to kill four more people to bring the numbers of victims to 20 which was the target set by the spirit mother.



L-R: Ayoola Ogunlowo and Ifeoluwa Popoola, founders of Kolopay

He also admitted to collecting ransom from his victims' families after which he still killed them because of his desperation to meet the ritual target that would enable him acquire power to do whatever he wishes.

Meanwhile, Governor Samuel Ortom who visited the locations of the mass grave told newsmen that there are still four suspects to be apprehended in connection with the findings which he described as 'horrific'.

"It is time up for criminality to thrive in the state. Imagine that some persons have been missing for more than three years and in some instances, ransom was paid by their relatives yet they were murdered by these persons whose motives is to make quick money. Not even the best lawyer in the country can save them now. I urge Benue indigenes to give information to security agencies to eliminate this," Ortom posited.

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