

Imo: How man, 26, died over LG crisis

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■ The late Ahamefule



■ Governor Emeka Ihedioha

How man, 26, died over LG crisis

When a 26-year-old Maduawuchukwu Ahamefule stepped out of his Umuemeziem compound in Umundugba in Isu Local Government Area of Imo State on January 6, little did he know that he was bidding final farewell to his lovely family.

Few hours later, Ahamefule, the only child of his widowed mother, became the only casualty of the clash between suspended local

government chairmen in Imo State and members of the Interim Management Committee (IMC).

According to reports, the immediate past chairman of Isu Local Government Area, Chinonso Nwadike, had in the late hours of Sunday of that fateful week, circulated messages that he would resume duties. Nwadike, along with 26 other local government chairmen, who were elected under the All Progressives Congress (APC) on August 25, 2018, were suspended from office on June 17, 2019 by Governor Emeka Ihedioha.

On January 6, the suspended chairmen mobilised their supporters to resume work. They said they were acting on the strength of a Supreme Court ruling in a case between their counterparts in Ekiti State, who suffered similar fate in the hands of their state government. The court had ruled that state governors had no powers to sack elected local government officials at the third tier of government.

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Narrating their ordeal, Chinonso Dike said, "When we got there, the whole offices, including that of the chairman, were locked.

We waited for about two hours, and when nobody came to open the doors, we decided to go home. But just as we stepped out of the gate of the local government, hell was let loose as what we heard next was gunfire. We did not know the direction of the gunfire, so we all ran to different directions. In the process, some of us were hit. Ahamefule was not lucky as he was hit by stray bullets on the chest and face. He died instantly.”

Dike blamed supporters of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for the death of Ahamefule. He alleged that the gunmen were led by one Uzundu Gogo and another man popularly known as 12/12. Gogo reportedly hails from Ebenano Ekwe, a neighbouring village. He said the situation was brought under control when the police came and dispersed the rampaging crowd.

But Kissinger Ikeokwu, one of the aides of Governor Emeka Ihedioha, denied the claim. He said the report he got was that it was actually supporters of the APC that started the shooting. He said it was when they were denied entry into the premises of the local government secretariat that they went berserk.

The situation was replicated in most of the local government areas of the state.

In Owerri West, chairman of the IMC, Innocent Ekenma, was alleged to have mobilised over 2,000 youths to ward off supporters

of the APC from approaching the gate of the council secretariat at Umuguma.

At the headquarters of Oguta Local Government, the immediate past chairman, Mgbirokwu, a lawyer, was resisted by PDP supporters as he led his supporters to invade the council.

In Aboh Mbaize, the divisional police officer in the area was said to have led his men to disperse the rampaging crowd from both sides. In Orsu, the former chairman, Mr Ndubuisi Okonkwo and his supporters, were not allowed to cross the gate of the secretariat.

There are, however, different accounts of those who were responsible for the crisis as the APC and PDP accuse each other of being responsible for the shooting.

In order not to allow the incident repeat itself, the state government obtained a court order the following day, restraining the former chairmen from invading the local councils in the state. The order was sequel to an ex parte application filed by the attorney-general and commissioner for justice, Ndukwe Nnawuchi, asking that the former chairmen be restrained from doing anything to jeopardise the smooth running of the local councils.

Granting the application, Justice Eze Ohiri Njemanze urged all the parties to maintain the status quo as at June 17. He said that since the chairmen had a case in court against their dissolution, they

should wait for its outcome. He, therefore, fixed the hearing of the main suit on January 28.

In their reaction, the police in Imo State blamed the former chairmen for the fracas. The police public relations officer of the command, Orlando Ikeokwu, a superintendent of police, said the former chairmen were wrong to have acted on a judicial decision in a case from another state.

He said, “We were only there to ensure the security of lives and property of citizens. The ousted council chairmen said they had a Supreme Court judgement, but to the best of the knowledge of the command, there is no such thing.

“The norm is that the bailiff would serve you with a court order; and they didn’t have it. More so, the judgement they were referring to is that of Ekiti State. There is no way you can import a judgement from another state, even if they are similar. So there is no order directing them to take over.”

But the APC said they were solidly behind the suspended chairmen in their actions. A special adviser to former Governor Rochas

Okorochoa, Sam Onwuemeodo, said the suspended chairmen resumed work “in respect to a Supreme Court judgement.” He

added that “the chairmen and councillors had been peaceful in their conducts.”

On Thursday, the scenario took a different dimension when new claimants to the offices emerged. A group operating under the umbrella of the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON), Imo State chapter (2010 -2013 group), said that if any group would benefit from that judgement, they should be the ones.

The group, which comprises of elected local government chairmen that were sacked by past governments in the state, including that of the immediate past governor, Okorocha, in a press briefing said, “It’s unfortunate that these illegal products of the Okorocha administration have decided to lay claim to the recent directives issued by the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Hon Justice Tanko Mohammed, to the effect that following a plethora of judgements by the Supreme Court of Nigeria, all democratically elected local government administrations illegally dissolved or sacked by respective governors or state administrations across the country ought, and should return to their offices to serve out their tenures and mandates.

“We want to make it categorically clear that the only group in Imo State eminently qualified to benefit from that landmark declarative order by the Chief Justice of Nigeria is our set, that is the 2010

ALGON members, illegally dissolved by the immediate past governor of Imo State.”

Meanwhile, while all the arguments rage, the family of Ahamefule is yet to come to terms with what happened to their breadwinner. His widowed mother, Juliana Ahamefule, could not comprehend what happened to her only son. His 21-year-old wife, Oluchi and her three kids, aged five, four and one and half years, looked confused when our correspondent spoke with them.

It was gathered that a decision was taken to get a wife for him to continue the family’s lineage as the only son, and having lost his father at a tender age.

As at the time of filing this report, it was not yet decided when the late Ahamefule would be buried.

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