

IN-DEPTH

Disquiet over killing of ex-LASU student

From Christiana T. Alabi

There is disquiet within the Lagos State University (LASU) community over the killing of an ex-student, Mr. Nurudeen Alowonle, popularly known as 'Omomeewa' by yet-to-be-identified assailants.

The incident it was gathered, took place in the evening of Wednesday, August 18, 2021, outside the university campus, along Egbeda Igando road in Lagos, few hours after he faced a disciplinary panel of the university.

Late Alowonle, a student activist had been accused of 'admission racketeering' and had appeared before the LASU disciplinary panel a few hours before he was attacked and killed.

Who was Alowonle?

Alowonle was the coordinator of the Lagos State Chapter of Education Rights Campaign (ERC) and a member of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM).

He was also a frontline student leader in LASU, a former presidential candidate in the Students Union election of 2019 and a supporter of struggles of workers, youth, and the poor masses. He was married and had a four-month-old baby.

In 2019, Alowonle was accused of 'admission racketeering' by the management of LASU but was not declared guilty as he was until his death still facing the disciplinary panel of the institution.

The deceased who graduated from the Faculty of Education, LASU in 2020 had his result and certificate seized on the excuse that he had a pending case at the disciplinary panel and as a result, he could not proceed with the compulsory one-year National Youth Service.

Alowonle had before his death accused the LASU management of setting him up; saying the allegation levelled against him was untrue and unfounded.

Students Union condemns attack, decry insecurity around campus

The LASU Students Union (LASUSU) leadership has decied the growing insecurity around the main campus of the institution at Ojo; saying Alowonle was shot by gunmen suspected to be armed robbers.

The president of LASUSU, Comrade Badmus Oladipupo Uthman, in a statement revealed that a comrade and Senior Assistant Registrar of LASU, Mr. Waheed Majekodunmi, who was with the deceased at

the time of the attack explained that they were on their way home at about 10 pm when they were attacked by suspected armed robbers.

He further narrated that Alowonle received fatal shots, which claimed his life while Majekodunmi survived but sustained serious injuries.

According to him, the Igando-Iyana Iba axis plied by thousands of students has in recent times become a dangerous route and called for urgent action. "In recent times, we have received disturbing reports of armed robbery and other attacks on unsuspecting students," he lamented.

While condemning the attacks, he called on the Lagos State government to come to the aid of students of the institution by providing 24-hour security patrols around it and to guarantee members of LASU a safe and peaceful environment for learning, industry and service.

He commiserated with the wife, family and loved ones of the deceased and urged the students to remain peaceful as they mourn Alowonle, who he described as a vibrant student.

Uthman disclosed to Daily Trust that the union is awaiting an autopsy to be conducted on the deceased.

On the allegation levelled against the deceased by the school management, Uthman said, "Alowonle 'Omomeewa' was a man of integrity. We don't know how he got connected with that kind of situation and we don't think he could be part of such act."

Rights group calls for probe

Following Alowonle's death, a group under the aegis of Education Rights Campaign (ERC) has demanded immediate arrest and prosecution of his killers.

It also called for a probe panel constituted by elected representatives of the students union, staff unions, trade unions and civil society to unravel the circumstances surrounding his unfortunate death, including possible complicity of the university administration.

A statement jointly signed by the national coordinator and national mobilization officer of ERC, Ogunjimi Isaac, and Michael Lenin respectively, said Alowonle would not have met his untimely death if he had not been hounded by the management of LASU.

The group further alleged that LASU management had subjected the deceased to varying levels of victimization over the past three years because of his principled opposition to



■ Alowonle

the management's anti-student and anti-worker policies.

Comrade Majekodunmi, who was attacked alongside the deceased, according to ERC is a member of the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and serving as a staff adviser of the ERC.

ERC accused LASU of failing to pursue the 'contrived case' diligently over the past two years.

"The disciplinary panel had sat very perfunctorily, postponed sittings several times for no genuine reason, and refused to call key witnesses thereby unnecessarily dragging the case for over two years, from 2019 till 2021. The reason for this was simply because this was a phantom case of admission racketeering which the university was in no position to prove.

"The university management under the immediate past vice-chancellor, Professor Olanrewaju Fagbohun, had instituted the case against the deceased in October 2019.

This was in retribution for his role in students' struggles on the campus and particularly his solidarity with the workers unions on the campus," the group alleged.

They said the deceased had taken permission from work to appear before the panel with his lawyer, Barrister Nurudeen Temilola Yusuf, on August 18 only to be asked to return after

two weeks.

"We demand an end to tyranny and victimization of student and workers activists in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In this wise, we demand the immediate recall of all victimized student and staff activists in any tertiary institution in Nigeria and the restoration of all banned unions.

"We also demand the immediate recall of all sacked workers' leaders in LASU," ERC said.

It commiserated with the deceased's wife, son and the entire family and wished them the fortitude to bear the painful loss.

LASU reacts, explains ex-students death

The management of LASU has expressed shock over the attack on Alowonle, who it said was attacked alongside its Senior Assistant Registrar, Mr. Waheed Majekodunmi, which led to the untimely death of the former.

In a statement issued by the university's Coordinator, Centre for Information Press and Public Relations (CIPPR), Ademola Adekoya, the school management expressed its condolences to the immediate and extended families of the deceased, his colleagues, friends and the entire student's body of the university.

It, however, explained that investigation carried out so far showed that Alowonle was a

former student of the university but was yet to receive his certificate due to an ongoing disciplinary case he was facing in the university.

The panel presiding over his case, according to the statement, began sitting in 2019 and continued until 2020 but could not sit due to the COVID-19 pandemic-enforced lockdown, which took the larger part of the year.

"He was invited by the panel, alongside several other students who had ongoing disciplinary cases, on Wednesday to defend himself.

"Omomeewa appeared before the panel that same day as scheduled. He was in fact, the first student attended to by the panel, and his case was concluded before 2pm.

"Alowonle ostensibly remained on the university campus until late in the evening during which time he met with Mr. Waheed Majekodunmi.

"Unfortunately, they were attacked by men of the underworld, who dispossessed them of their valuables and shot at them.

"The Staff member, Mr. Majekodunmi was lucky to have escaped with the gunshot wounds and eventually got helped by passers-by to a nearby hospital, but sadly, Alowonle did not survive the attack," the statement reads in part.

It disclosed that the university security department is working with security agencies to investigate the incident and bring the perpetrators to book.

LASUSU issues ultimatum

The Lagos State University Students Union (LASUSU) has asked the State Government and the university management to fast-track the process of the autopsy on the late Alowonle so as to release the body for burial in time, being a Muslim.

President of the union, Comrade Badmus Oladipupo Uthman also demanded that the perpetrators of the dastardly act be brought to book while security men should be permanently deployed to all the gates that lead to the university as well as to other strategic places that are considered red zones.

"The Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) agreement between the state government and private property developers made on December 25, 2019 to provide 8,272 hostel units within 18 months on LASU campus should be fast-tracked," the union demanded, giving the State Government and the University Management seven days ultimatum to meet its demands.