

How Gombe student died waiting for Governor Yahaya

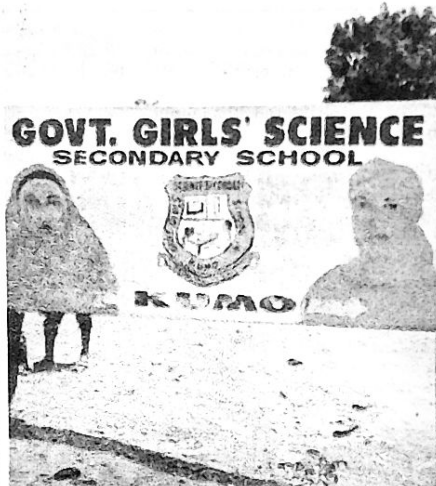
● Bereaved parents seek justice

Penultimate Wednesday, a 16-year-old secondary school student was killed by a commercial driver in Kumo town of Akko Local Government Area of Gombe State. The young girl, Rahab Hassan, was hit while awaiting the arrival of Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya on an official visit. *Daily Trust Saturday* visited Rahab's family in her country home, Tula-Baule in Kaltungo Local Government Area of the state and reports.



■ Late Rahab Hassan

■ Mr Hassan Sukuntale, father of late Rahab



■ Signboard of Government Girls Science Secondary School, Kumo, late Rahab's school

Haruna Gimba Yaya, Gombe

When a 16-year-old Rahab Hassan bid her parents farewell to resume school at Kumo, Akko Local Government Area of Gombe State, they didn't know that it was the last time they would see their daughter alive.

The late Rahab left her home at Jalingo village of Tula-Baule in mid-January to resume at Government Girls' Science Secondary School (GGSSS), Kumo, a boarding school, after spending Christmas with her family.

However, less than two months after she left home, her lifeless body was brought back for interment. The promising young girl's life was cut off by an unfortunate but avoidable accident.

The tragedy struck on March 2 when a driver who was coming from Gombe and heading towards Jalingo in Taraba State, knocked down young Rahab. She sustained injuries and died few hours later at the Federal Teaching Hospital (FTH), Gombe.

Daily Trust Saturday gathered that the incident happened as a result of a directive by their school authority, who instructed the students to line up along the ever-busy Gombe-Yola highway to welcome Governor Yahaya who was billed to visit the town for an official assignment. The teenager was in Senior Secondary I.

The governor was at Kumo, the headquarters of Akko Local Government to witness the signing of a memorandum of understanding with a foreign university for the take-off of academic activities at the Gombe State University of Science and Technology (GSUST) located in the town.

The principal of the school, Saratu Joda, narrated how the young girl was killed while waiting for the arrival of the governor.

"Our students were out to welcome Governor Yahaya. As we were there, a

reckless commercial driver, one Abubakar Umar, 26, hit her. We immediately took her to a hospital here in Kumo, but we were referred to the FTH, Gombe.

"It was at the FTH that she passed away. The commissioner for education, Dauda Batari Zambuk, was there with us throughout the incident, which occurred around 12:30pm, even before the arrival of the governor," she said.

We want compensation - Rahab's parents

When our correspondent visited Rahab's village, her father, Mr Hassan Sukuntale, 52, who sat under a tree, alongside his wife, wore a gloomy face.

Sukuntale narrated how he received the sad news of the untimely death of his young and promising daughter.

"I received a call that faithful evening that my daughter was involved in an accident and was rushed to hospital in Gombe. First, I was surprised because I sent my daughter to a boarding school and wondered how she could be involved in an accident outside her school premises.

"By the time we arrived Gombe, we only saw her dead body. It was later that we were told she was hit by a driver while the students awaited the arrival of the governor and his entourage to Kumo."

Speaking in an emotion-laden voice, Mr Sukuntale said the family were not satisfied with the explanation and wondered why their daughter would be sent to receive the governor.

He said, "We are not satisfied with the explanation given to us. We must be paid compensation for losing our loved one unjustifiably because we didn't send her to do politics.

"We are not happy. We have been struggling to pay her school fees, hoping that one day she would help us and her siblings, only to wake up with the sad news of her

untimely death because of negligence by the school authority.

"We want the government to pay us for the loss of our daughter; we didn't send her to Kumo to receive politicians."

Rahab's mother supported her husband's plea for compensation, saying, "When we heard that she died, we thought it was as a result of an illness, but we were told that it was an accident at a roadside where they lined up to receive the governor, who was in the town for a working visit.

"If the school authority didn't ask them to come out and receive the governor, our daughter would still be alive to fulfill her dream of acquiring a degree. The students were entrusted to the school authority, but they clearly betrayed that trust, which led to the untimely death of our dear daughter."

Rahab was the fourth and last child of Mr and Mrs Sukuntale. The eldest daughter was married off after her secondary education, while the second child couldn't continue beyond secondary school. The third child is still in secondary school.

Being a brilliant student, her father decided to send her to GGSSS, Kumo, hoping that she would get a good result that would enable her enroll in a university, which was her dream.

Rahab's mother added, "She was very obedient and always helped in house chores and the farm whenever she was at home for holidays. We always wanted her to be close to us.

"After her primary and junior secondary education at Jalingo-Tula and Tula-Baule respectively, she showed interest in going to Kumo. And because we wanted the best for her, we agreed and raised some money and sent her to the GGSSS as she desired."

As a result of public outcry, four days after the incident, the secretary to the Gombe State Government, Professor Ibrahim Abubakar Njodi, led a delegation to sympathise with

the parents of the late Rahab.

He told newsmen that the state government received the death of the schoolgirl with great shock and sadness, describing it as a big loss, not only to her immediate family but the state in general.

"They lost a young girl they hoped would hold the future for them. But because they know that it was the act of God act, they have accepted their fate. They also know that government has not abandoned them," Prof. Njodi said.

The commissioner for education, Zambuk, also said his ministry did all it could to save Rahab's life.

"As soon as she was knocked down we rushed her to the hospital in Kumo; and after some first aid, we were referred to the FTH, Gombe. It was there that she succumbed to the impact of the accident," he said.

Zambuk added that the Ministry of Education, and by extension, the state government, was deeply saddened by the incident, and prayed that God would grant her soul eternal rest.

The commissioner also defended the action of the school authority, which assembled the students by the roadside to welcome the governor, saying it is an age-long tradition.

He said, "For students to come out to welcome a governor is normal. It is done out of love and for the fact that Governor Yahaya is working. It depends on what function the governor is doing. So it is natural for students to come out and welcome him."

CSOs condemn action

The Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (ANGO) has condemned the action of the school authority.

Addressing newsmen, the chairman of the ANGO, which is a coalition of civil society organisations (CSOs) working in the state said, "We strongly condemn the continuous assembling of pupils and students by roadsides in the name of welcoming the governor's convoy or any other Very Important Person (VIP).

"This ugly incident, which led to the killing of an innocent girl recently, is unacceptable and must be stopped," he said.

Yusuf also called on security agencies and relevant stakeholders to ensure the immediate removal of political stands from the premises of schools in the state so that pupils and students would be safe.

The association also called on Governor Yahaya to tender public apology and ensure compensation to the family of the late Rahab with immediate effect.

Government will do the needful - Commissioner

The commissioner for education, Mr Zambuk, told *Daily Trust Saturday* that apart from the delegation that visited the family of the late Rahab last Sunday, the ministry is offering a scholarship to any of her siblings.

"At the Ministry of Education we are willing to offer admission to any of Rahab's siblings in a boarding school of his or her choice in the state. However, other things done by the government would not be made public for security consideration on the part of the bereaved family," he explained.

Driver charged to court - Police

The Gombe State police command said the driver who allegedly killed Rahab was arrested and taken to custody. He had taken to his heels after the accident.

The command's public relations officer, SP Obed Mary Malum, said the suspect, Abubakar Umar, 26, of Jauru Jatau village was coming from Gombe to Jalingo in Taraba State when the accident occurred.

She said Umar was charged for reckless driving and failure to report the accident to the police, which are contrary to sections 65, 21, 22 and 23 of the road traffic act.

She added that the suspect was arraigned before a Chief Magistrate's Court in Kumo and remanded at the Billiri Custodial Centre while waiting for legal advice from the Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP).