



# THE METROSection

## No pity for 100-yr old, burnt to death

• Assailants haunt family members, banish them from Ondo town



• Chief Agbori

**N**OBODY in the sleepy agrarian settlement of Iyere-Owo in Ondo State has ever heard a thing like that before.

The villagers feel it is alien, not in their culture, that anyone in the community would feel so aggrieved against another as to go ahead and murder the person. Stranger still is that the victim is a centenarian and traditional titleholder.

The murdered person is Chief Salami Agbede Agbori.

The aged man's murder has called into question whether the age-long tradition of reverence for old age and sanctity of human life still holds; and whether it is right for the alleged killers to be walking the streets as freemen, boasting of their deeds and daring anybody to challenge them.

On January 6 this year, the climax came in a 25-year-old land dispute when a gang of land speculators invaded No. 68, Oke Bola Street, Iyere-Owo, where 100-year-old Agbori lived.

They told the old man that their mission was to raze the place.

The old man had, since 1982, been embroiled in a land tussle with some members of the community and he got favourable judgment in 1988 at the Owo High Court presided over by Justice Ogunleye.

Besides being recognised by government as owner of the disputed parcel of land located behind his residence, which family members said became theirs by inheritance, with a valid Certificate of Occupancy (C of O), he also defeated his opponents at the Benin Federal Court of Appeal in 1990.

Yet the miscreants who were armed with guns, cutlasses and charms and led by a member of the town's traditional council, who was also a major litigant in the land case against Pa Agbori, allegedly proclaimed that they were there to teach the Agbori family a lesson.

The hoodlums were said to have told everybody in the one-storey building to leave without taking away any property. But they disallowed the silvery-haired old man, who incidentally was the traditional head of that quarter of the town, to leave.

Despite the pleadings and entreaties that the wizened, frail man could muster, that his life be spared, the assailants set fire to the building and dared him to use his widely-acclaimed magical powers to escape from the inferno.

Besides being a chief, Agbori was a traditional herbal practitioner whose prowess at solving knotty health problems through the use of herbs, is known all over Ondo State and even beyond.

Behind his residence was a traditional clinic where he took care of the sick that in many instances were brought from outside the village after orthodox medicine had failed to produce the desired results.

For the several hours the house was on fire, the hoodlums completely took over the town, even forcibly siphoning petrol from hapless motorists to throw into the inferno.

Strangely, there was no sign of law enforcement agents to restore sanity, despite the fact that the Police Area Command in Owo is only a few kilometres away.

Eyewitnesses said that although members of the Agbori family lodged a report when the invaders came, the Police said they lacked the means to dislodge the hoodlums and instead told those who brought the report to try the tradi-



• The burnt storey building

From Niya Bello, Akure

tional council.

An attempt by the state fire fighters to put out the fire was also thwarted by the miscreants who blocked every route to the scene and warned the wailing relatives not to try to rescue the old man if they didn't want to die with him.

They also cut the trees in front of the building and the ones inside the traditional market adjacent to it, signifying, according to the culture of the people, the passing away of an important personality in the town.

Even after the last embers of the fire had died, with property whose value was put at millions of naira gone, the invaders still prevented the family from entering the now gutted building to remove the remains of their father.

They were afraid that the old man's fabled magical powers would not let him perish in the fire. They believed that he would have vanished to reappear, somewhere else. But it was all a lie to shield their dastardly crime.

In an attempt to further cover the crime they put palm fronds at the entrances to the compound to declare the place a no-go area and banished the family members not only from the house, but also from the community.

Even the house of a relative who offered to accommodate the fleeing members, was also torched by the hoodlums.

The family however insisted that the remains of their father was inside the rubbles and that the elders of the town should help appeal to his killers to allow him a befitting burial.

Twenty-one days later, after a lot of entreaties, two daughters of the slain chief were allowed into the rubbles.

Inside and under the bed in what must have been an attempt to escape his assailants, the remains of their patriarch, identified only by the skull, was found.

When perhaps the legal import of what they had done dawned on them, the assailants gave another condition to the family: That they will only be allowed to bury their dead if they signed an undertaking that they would not involve the state in the matter.

The children, not willing to deny their father a final resting place and fully aware of the great historical significance it portends for generations yet unborn, acceded to the condition.

To demonstrate how serious they were, the hoodlums, now working in concert with the traditional leadership of the town and a former Senator, requested that the undertaking must be prepared by the Registry of an Ondo State High Court, duly signed by a Commissioner of Oath and

that it should also be accompanied by another letter from the family's lawyer.

An earlier petition addressed to the police, calling for investigation into the matter, was withdrawn while further conditions were prescribed for the burial which included that the tomb must not be made conspicuous, that only a few children should conduct the burial and that the whole process must be very brief and without pomp.

Seven days after its discovery and after an undertaking, which curiously was signed with members of the Homicide Section of the Nigeria Police as the arbitrators at their Ondo State headquarters in Akure, the family was eventually allowed to bury their patriarch in accordance with the agreed conditions.

Afterwards, the town's traditional leadership took control of the disputed land from the family and confined them only to the 100 feet by 50 feet on which the burnt building stands.

In the agreement paper signed by Claudius Ugbo, Chairman of the Traditional Council; its Secretary, Orisanyi J. and Ayo Lawrence, an Ondo North Senator between 1999 and 2003, the council strangely absolved anybody of the murder of the centenarian.

They claimed that they "do not believe that it was Agbede Agbori that got burnt in his house and that he may have died before the fire completed the deed or that he disappeared miraculously being a powerful man".

They also warned the family to agree "that the cause of the burning is not known and (that) even if the cause is known, that they are no longer interested in the matter since it is difficult to pin point anybody in a mob action".

Some members of the family who spoke to *The Guardian* confessed that they have been carrying a heavy burden and that the controversial land has now been shared among the chiefs who have already begun to sell their portions.

But perhaps the million naira question is whether the police can stall prosecution in a criminal case by being part of a weird "peaceful agreement" to sweep a heinous crime like the murder of a centenarian under the carpet?

Efforts to speak with the Police proved abortive as they all declined to comment on the issue.

But a source at the Police Headquarters, Akure, said: "It is part of the duty of the police to resolve cases amicably without necessarily going to court if the disputing parties agreed as in this case".

But the Agbori family are not satisfied, alleging that the Police have been extensively compromised in the murder of their patriarch, dispossessed and ostracised from the land of their forefathers.

### Briefs

#### DPC Lagos, meets Sunday

**T**HE monthly general meeting of the Delta Peers Club (DPC), Lagos holding this Sunday will be hosted by Mr. Emmanuel Freeman-John at his No. 1/3, Tokotaya Amure Street, off Mabadeje Street, Lowa Estate, by Zenith Bank, Ikodu from 3.00 p.m.

#### Pharmnews workshop

**A** WORKSHOP on clinical pharmacy and ward rounds organised by Pharmnews Ltd., publishers of *Pharmnews*, will hold on Monday, June 18, and Tuesday, June 19, at Nisrel Training Centre, Elephant House, Ikeja, Lagos from 9.00a.m. to 4.00p.m. daily.

Facilitators at the workshop include Dr. T. O. Fajemirokun, Mrs. M. O. Obono, Mrs. E. O. Oyeneeye and Mrs. M. S. Alli among others.

Also, another workshop on pharmaceutical care holds on Wednesday, June 20 to Thursday, 21 at the same venue at 9.00a.m.

#### Church begins revival

**S**T. Barnabas Anglican Church, will this Thursday begin its four-day revival at the church auditorium, Nos. 3/5, St. Paul's Street, by Ayo-ni Bus Stop, Mafoluku, Oshodi, Lagos at 6.00p.m. daily. Sunday's event begins at 10.00a.m.

With the theme: "The Great Banquet," Mr. Emma Ezeugo will speak while Rev. Chudi Obi is the vicar.

#### Church marks anniversary

**T**HE Redeemed Christian Church of God, Solution Arena, Lagos Province 14, will begin activities to mark its fifth anniversary from Tuesday, June 12 to Sunday, June 17, at the church auditorium, No. 3, Sanusi Street, off Adebimpe Street, off Liasu Road, Idimu, Lagos.

With the theme: "God is faithful", Pastor I. O. Akobi will minister while Pastor Femi Oke is the host.

#### Nwakunor, 67, passes on

**T**HE death has occurred of Mrs. Eugenia Amambiwendi Nwakunor. She died on May 11, at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), Idi-Araba, at the age of 67.

A social wake holds on Friday, June 15, at her residence, No. 21A, Church Street, Olaleye-Village, Iponri, Lagos at 6.00p.m.

Another wake holds at her hometown, Ogwashi Uku, Delta State on Thursday, June 21 at 6.00p.m. while burial holds on Friday, June 22.

She is survived by children and grand children among whom is Gregory Austin Nwakunor of *The Guardian*.



• Nwakunor

**The hoodlums were said to have told everybody in the one-storey building to leave without taking away any property. But they disallowed the silvery-haired old man, who incidentally was the traditional head of that quarter of the town, to leave**