

JUSTHUMAN

Murder So Brutal

For 20 years, she lived in America, 10 of them as a single who was abandoned with her three kids. Last month, she decided to visit home with her daughter and two sons, who were all coming to their fatherland for the first time in their lives. Barely 24 hours later, she was murdered in her father's house, in rather very troubling circumstances. Was it a case of premeditated murder or armed robbery?

BY FELIX ABUGU

"MY mom is dead. My hard working, loving and caring mother has died. I don't want this to be true but it is...She suffered a horrible death; she didn't deserve to die that way.

"My mom hadn't been back to her country in over 19 years. She was finally able to go, and took my brothers and I with her (it was our first time ever being here).

"Every day, she would talk about Nigeria; she would always tell us about Nigeria. She just wanted to visit her family that she hadn't seen in so long and show us her country. She bought so many gifts for her family and had been preparing for this trip for a while.

"We arrived at our family's home (our grand parents' home in Ihiala, Anambra State) at almost 12 midnight. On June 3, 2007, just the next day of our arrival, this terrible thing happened..."

Those were the anguished words of Benita Okanume whose mother Ifeoma Okanume, the only parent she knew most of her life, was brutally murdered, in very controversial circumstances, in her father's house, barely 24 hours after she returned from the United States. And to think that this young lady was visiting her country for the first time in all of her 18 years on earth!

Indeed, if Mrs. Virginia Ifeoma Okanume, nee Nwabuba, had had inkling of the terrible fate that awaited her at home, she certainly would not have elected to visit after a 20-year sojourn in the United States. But she was no clairvoyant, no Nostradamus and therefore, couldn't have seen tomorrow. How could she have known that her own father's house, the very house where she was born and brought up, would turn out to be her graveyard of sorts, where she would be tortured, shot and left to bleed to death, in rather very troubling circumstances? How could she have known that after working so hard as a single parent to make meaning out of her life and those of her children, she would return home to share the joy of success with her family only to be brutally murdered by men showing so much for her and disdain for life?

The story of Ifeoma Okanume's murder is a sad reminder that life is yet too deep for man to comprehend. Perhaps only she, out there in the spirit world, is now in a position to understand why she died the way she did. Or, for the time being, who her killers are.

In the mortal world, the living can only shed tears and ask the usual rhetorical question: God, but why? Or confront the authorities with a demand for justice for the survivor-relatives.

And, so in that spirit, Ifeoma's children, mother, brother Joe in

Holland, sister Maureen, married to Philip Okroafor and living in Lagos with her family, and A-Zee Intel Network, a private investigating outfit and others are asking questions of the authorities: who killed our mother, daughter and sister? What is being done to apprehend the killers?

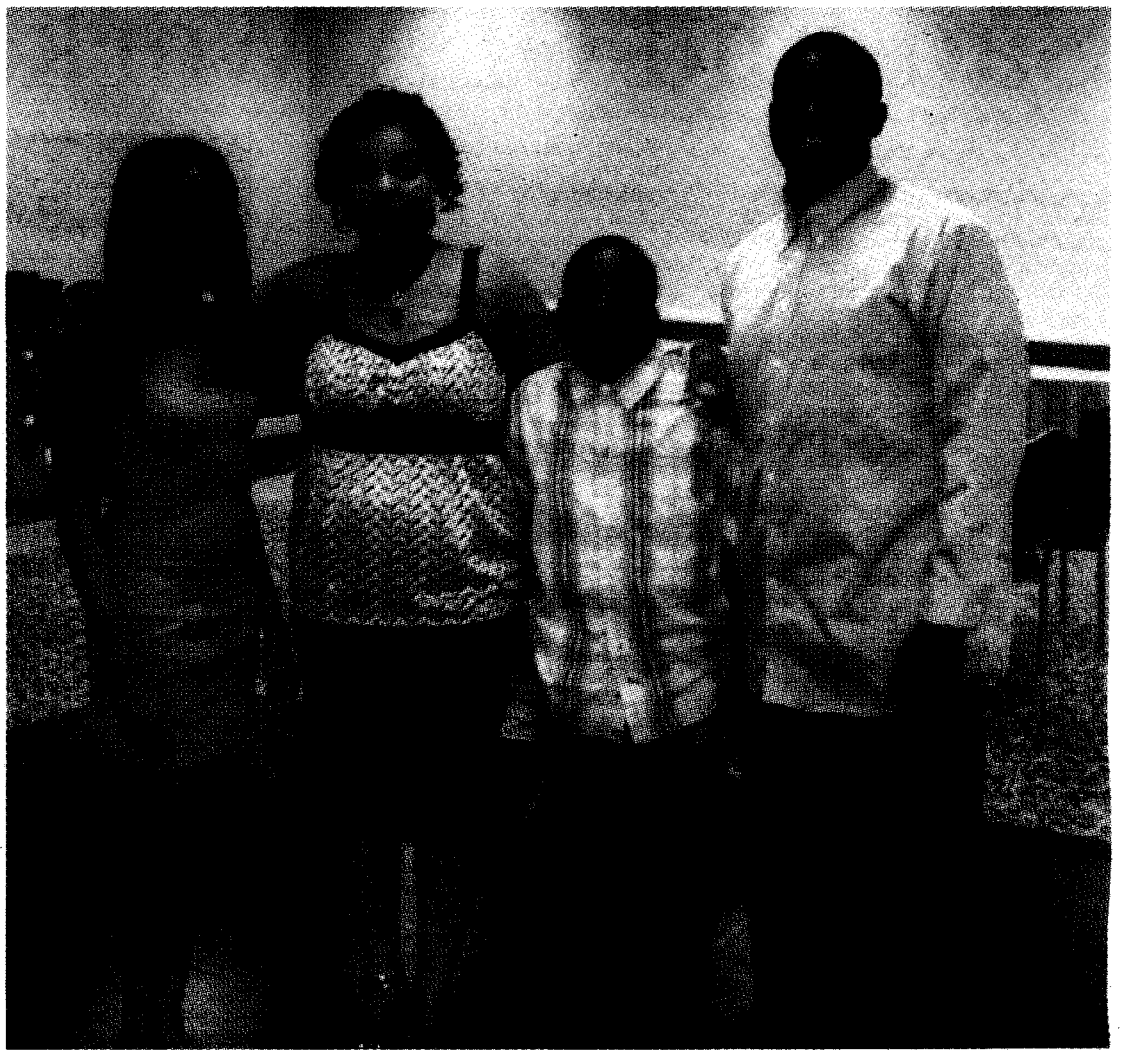
In affidavits deposed to at Maryland, County of Charles, United States of America by Benita and her brother Benjamin and sent as petitions to the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Mike Okiro, Ifeoma's children and their niece Maureen A-Zee Intel Network, a private security outfit based in Enugu, also in separate petitions to the IGP, described in moving details how the young mother of three was murdered in the afternoon of June 3, this year. And they ask: will the IGP let the perpetrators of this heinous crime go free?

According to the petitions, about 2.30pm on the fateful June 3, Mrs. Okanume, who had the previous day endured a gruelling 10 hour journey from Lagos to her home town Ihiala, had taken her two sons, Benjamin, 17, and Bennett, 10, down from the second floor apartment in her father's house in Ihiala, Anambra State. They had gone to inspect her Toyota SUV, a gleaming white bird, which had just been delivered to the family compound that afternoon, clear two days after it was to have been delivered to her in Lagos to travel in back to the east, on her return from the United States where she lived and worked as a nurse.

After inspecting the car, which had been shipped from the US weeks earlier and was also supposed to have come with the number plates but was finally delivered without them, the woman and her children moved straight into her father's living room, which is downstairs, for what was described as 'a family meeting' summoned by the old man. She never went back upstairs on her own accord and never lived to tell any story.

Wrote Benjamin in a gory detail of how hoodlums snuffed the life out of his hard working mother: "After seeing the car, my mom, Bennett (the youngest of the three Okanume children) and I enter my grandfather's house...I greet two other old people there, along with my grandfather. So, there are a total of six people. My mom takes a seat. I go sit next to Bennett and before I can even sit down, the first gunman runs into the house.

"The gunman is wearing a white T-shirt and asking 'where is the money?' Each of us in the room does not know what is going on. At first, I think it is a joke. My grandfather then gets up and starts to fight with the gunman. The gunman could have shot him anytime but does not. That is when I realise something fishy is going on. So, the gunman throws my



Ifeoma with her children: Benita, left, Bennett right and Benjamin, (extreme right).

grandfather to the floor. The gunman tells every one to get down on the floor. Then the gunman throws a bottle of water at my mom and says, 'where is the money?' At this time, I am really angry about how he is disrespecting my mom, so I stand up from the floor and ball (clench) my fist.

"They start to force my mom upstairs and the last words I ever hear my beloved mom say are 'take it easy'. At this time, more gunmen come in, all of them without masks. They see me standing and tell me to get down using words (having been born in America, he does not understand Igbo) I did not understand. Then one of them kicks me in the face. While they are forcing my mom upstairs at gunpoint, I hear about three or four gunshots.

"Then, they come back to only me in the room out of the other five people left now and ask me for my money. I tell them that I am only 17, I want to go to college; I want to live. So, I give him (one of them) my \$5 and I think it is all over. After about five minutes, every one in the room gets up because we think the gunmen are gone. (But) they come running in there again and say, 'so you people think we are playing?' So, all of us get back on the ground.

"Then, the gunmen come only to Bennett and myself and ask for money again. One of the gunmen picks up a glass vase to hit me on the head. The only reason he does not hit me is because I am begging for my life. I remember saying, 'please I am only 17; please let us live, my brother is only 10.'

"So, they leave again...Then after about one minute, a different group of gunmen come and start to reach in Bennett's pocket. I tell them, 'please he is only 10; he has no money. Please, just leave him alone.' Then the guy in black shirt asks me for money. I tell him I already gave my money to another guy. He then shoots me in my right leg. As blood is rushing out, he tells me to get the hell up and show him where the money is. At this point, all I am thinking of is why am I going to die this way?

"I look behind me as I am going upstairs and I see the man in the black shirt reloading his gun. When I reach upstairs, I am in shock. This house had about 15 to 20 people in it. When I come in, it is vacant. So, I go to the room my family is staying and I get the two bags I remember the money being in. I really thought I was a dead man because I look into the bags and there is no money. While about five of them look through the suitcases, the gunman in blue dress says 'oh, so you are risking your life over money, so you want to die over money?'

"I really do not know where the money is, so I just beg for my life and sit back against the wall. They tell me to get up and follow them. When we leave (come out of) the room, my grandmother has my mom's money in her hand and gives it to them. So, I run into my grandma's room where I see Maureen, her daughter and a little boy. I thought Maureen was playing dead but I later found out she

was also shot in both legs. I try to hide under the bed but there is a little boy there.

"Now, I am thinking there is only one way for me to stay alive. I tell the boy to trust me; I tell him to lie on top of me, that they will not kill us. Just then, another gunman comes in, sees the boy and myself and just leaves. After about five minutes, I hear my grandma calling Maureen. I stand up and see something I will never forget for the rest of my life. Whoever did this should burn in hell: I see my one and only loving, caring, supportive mother, the best lady on this earth, in the doorway in a puddle of blood. I just start throwing things in the house because if I had known they only came to kill my mother, I would have at least tried to fight them while they forced her upstairs. I know I would be dead but at least I would be in heaven happy with my mom..."

Benita was still upstairs, preparing to join her mother and her brothers downstairs to inspect the newly delivered Toyota 4-runner when the commotion started. She was still in their room when the gunmen dragged her mother upstairs apparently on a vengeful mission to dispossess her of her money and then finish her off.

She gives a further chilling account of the brutal killing of her mother:

"Suddenly one of the gunmen came in from downstairs roughly holding my mother by the arm and a gun shoved into her back. Still in shock, I was so relieved that she was alive. After roughly shoving my mother, the man came up to me with the gun pointed to my face screaming 'Where is the money?' I tried to calm him down and said 'we'll find you the money.' He kept shouting 'Where is the money?' I repeated that we'll find it for him. He hit me in the face, still shouting about the money. He grabbed me and asked if I knew where the money was and said 'show us there it is!' I could see that he and another gunman were getting ready to take me to another room and I said that I didn't know where the money was because I really didn't know. He pulled the necklace off my neck and proceeded with his gun towards my aunt, Maureen, her little girl, my grandma and my mom who were still searching frantically for the money. I told my mom to stand behind me, but of course with all this commotion she wasn't listening. I just wanted to protect my mom. I just didn't want anything to happen to her.

"The gunman then hit my grandmother with the gun and tried to hit me with the gun but I shielded myself. He then hit my mother across the head with the hilt of his gun and her head started bleeding. (Anytime I remember this vivid image I be come very sad and disturbed that my mother was injured so terribly this way and suffered a horrible death). He attempted to do it again and I threw my hands around her head. He then grabbed her, still shouting about the money and then shot my mom in the

CONTD ON PAGE 4

Sad End Of A Working Mom

CONT'D FROM PAGE 3

leg. I did know what to do or think; I just saw my poor mom call out to my grandmother before she collapsed backward by the door. Blood was pouring out from her leg and spreading into a big pool of dark blood as he eyes rolled up in her head. I started screaming 'someone, please call a doctor! Someone, please help my mom!' I felt so hopeless because this was another country and there isn't a 911 that I could call to save my mother. My grandmother and my aunt were screaming, my three-year-old cousin was crying. The gunmen had left the room to go search around the house. I could hear other people screaming, more gunmen shouting, and gunfire outside the room. All I could see was my mother lying in a pool of blood on the floor. The gunman forced his way back to the room, intentionally hitting the door on my mother's head. My poor mom lay there unconscious; the door couldn't be fully open because my mom's body was right next to it. Standing at the door, he pointed the gun to my mother's head and shouted 'where is the money?' Even though she was clearly dying and appeared unconscious, this cruel and wicked man still pointed the gun to my helpless mother's head. Even though she was lying in a huge pool of blood and her eyes were rolled up, this man still pointed the gun to her head ready to shoot her again.

"My aunt came running up to him with the money, he snatched it and hit her. Again, he pointed the gun to my mother's head, even though we had given him the money. Clearly this wasn't just about money; they wanted to kill my mother. My aunt's little girl was crying in the background, screaming and gunfire continued outside the room. The gunman left the room again. My aunt picked up her little girl and tried to find a place to hide, I was still staring at my mother's helpless and motionless body hoping that she was still alive and hoping that the gunman wouldn't try to shoot her again.

My aunt pointed at a place for me to hide and I did myself behind a big trunk under the table and covered myself with clothes. I was praying for my mother's life. I heard more gunfire outside the room, more shouting from the gunmen, and more screaming. Then there was a silence of gunfire. Suddenly, I heard my brother screaming 'no...mom... someone call a doctor...please don't die.' I was in shock and so scared for my mom, I kept praying. I didn't hear my brother's voice anymore or the gunmen but I could still hear yelling. One of the maids comes in and tells me that the gunmen are gone. We were both crying and she was saying that they shot my mom. She guided me downstairs to the outside.

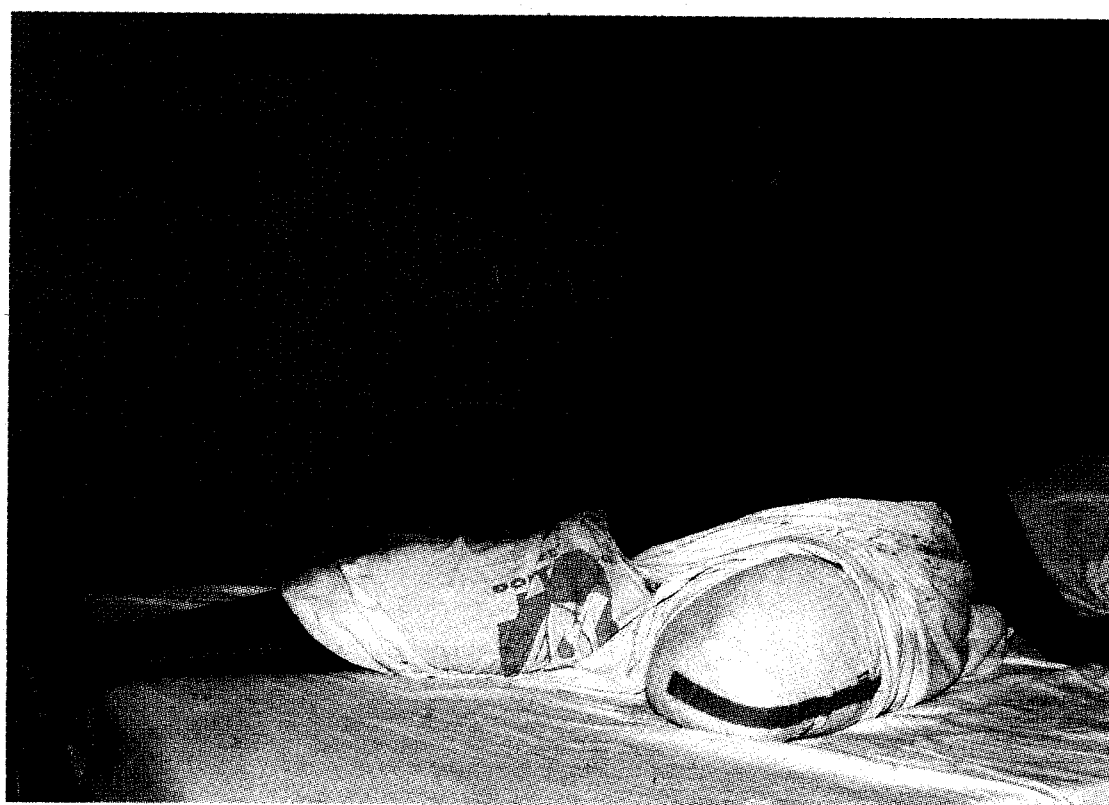
"I saw a crowd of people and my aunt sprawled on the middle of the ground with blood soaking her clothes, her eyes were open but unconscious. By the time we reached the bottom of the stairs, some of the people had carried her into a car and headed off to the hospital. I didn't see my mother or brother anywhere; I knew that they must have been sent to the hospital like my aunt. I was crying and praying that my mom would live. My world was spinning and crashing down before my eyes."

Mrs. Okanume Dies

Having been so terribly battered, Ifeoma Okanume was dead even before she was brought to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Ithiala, shot in the leg and three times in her private part. Her sister Maureen and son Benjamin were admitted for gunshot injuries. Maureen's left leg was later to be amputated from the thigh region.

Mrs. Okanume's journey to a brutal end

For 20 years, Virginia Ifeoma Okanume lived in the United States. After her married to Mr. Benedict Okanume of Ukpok, Nnewi South Local Council of Anamra State, they relocated to the United States. About



Maureen, Ifeoma's younger sister, with her amputated leg.

ten years ago, their marriage collapsed. After the split with her husband, Ifeoma Okanume was left to cater for three young children all alone. She was left with no other choice than to work hard. In fact, she literally immersed herself in her work as qualified professional nurse and was doing really well in the United States. In the course of time, she was able to buy herself a mansion in a good area of Maryland in the United States, send her children to good schools and own a fleet of choice cars.

But, although she had always told her children, who were all born in the United States, about Nigeria, she hadn't been able to bring them home. Allegedly persuaded by one of her uncles, Mr. Emmanuel Nwabuba, an international businessman resident in Aba, Abia State, Ifeoma finally decided it was time to take her children to their fatherland.

As part of the preparations for her travel, the well-heeled lady arranged with Mr. Nwabuba to ship to Nigeria one of her Toyota 4-runner cars or what is commonly called Jeep in these shores. She meant to use the car during her stay in Nigeria and perhaps to leave it behind for her parents or relatives when returning to the States.

The arrangement was that the car would be shipped to Nigeria, licensed and kept in Lagos for her to use in travelling to the East as soon as she flew into the country.

Part of the reason for bringing the car to Nigeria was that she also needed a vehicle big enough to also take some of the things she was bringing home both to sell and as gifts to people at home.

But the first shocker was that when Ifeoma and her family arrived in Lagos on June 1, that is last month, there was no Jeep waiting for her. It was only her younger sister Maureen, who is married and lives in Lagos with her husband and children, that was waiting for her at the airport. Angry, Ifeoma reportedly put a call through to her uncle still in the United States to find out why the car was not waiting for her in Lagos. It was then that Mr. Nwabuba told the late Ifeoma that the car had been taken to Owerri and would be waiting for her at home by the time she got to Ithiala. Meanwhile, would Ifeoma mind using his Hummer Jeep to travel to the east with her children?

The late nurse reportedly rejected the offer and instead chartered a commercial mini-bus which took her, her children and Maureen to Ithiala on Saturday June 2, arriving at her home town about 11.30pm-12midnight.

Again, there was no trace of the said car. Mr. Nwabuba's wife Lear was said to have telephoned Chief Francis Nwabuba, alias Mogambo, Ifeoma and Maureen's father, earlier on that the car would be in Ithiala that Saturday. Again, it was never brought from Owerri to Ithiala that Saturday. It was not until about 2pm the following day, that Sunday June 3, that the car drove in. But, surprisingly, it came without the registration plate numbers, which Mr. Emmanuel Nwabuba had told his cousin Ifeoma had been installed. According to the documents, the car had been registered on May 31. Maureen's stated in her petition that the late Ifeoma had complained bitterly about the state of the car when it was brought—that it was very dirty, the windows wound down while there were foot

marks all over the back seat seats. Those were things actually notice and pointed out by Ifeoma's son, a towering quarter-back in college football in the United States.

While Ifeoma and her two sons went into her father's apartment for the 'family meeting' which Chief Nwabuba had summoned, one of her step brothers named Nonso (after his wedding in the Catholic Church with his first wife, Ifeoma's mother Bessy in 1963, Francis Nwabuba was to marry additional five wives.) offered to wash the car. At Ifeoma's prompting, Maureen gave him the car keys.

Nonso was outside washing the car when the robbers came about 3pm, took the car keys from, robbed Ifeoma of her money, killed her and wounded her son and sister.

A case of Armed Robbery or premeditated murder?

The long-awaited Toyota Jeep was eventually delivered to Ifeoma by one Kennis alias Washer, said to be a long-standing associate of Emmanuel Nwabuba. On getting the news that the vehicle had arrived, Ifeoma's first son Benjamin hurriedly left the fortress of their apartment to inspect the Jeep to make sure that it was intact. The only thing abnormal was the discovery of many foot-marks on the floor of the backseat whose windows were kept down. Benjamin then asked Kennis why he carried strange persons in the vehicle the car and why the windows of the back seat area were kept down when the vehicle was fully air-conditioned? Kennis could not provide any answer but instead said he was in a hurry to go to Cotonou to clear a Hummer Jeep belonging to Emmanuel.

Curiously, this Hummer Jeep was supposed to have arrived in Nigeria in the same container that brought in the Toyota. At any rate, Ifeoma took delivery of the documents and keys of the Jeep and retreated back to the two-storey apartment, where her father had summoned them for 'a family meeting'.

But shortly after Kennis, who sources said spent less than 20 minutes after delivering the car, left, about 3pm, a band of armed robbers/assassins of about eight persons with a masked leader, made their way to Mogambo's place.

In her testimony to the police, which she later sent as a petition to the IG, Maureen alleged that when the robbers came, they collected the handsets of all present but that after the operation, the robbers gave Nonso's own back to him as they drove the Jeep out of the compound. The exchange of handset between the robbers and Nonso was witnessed by no other person than his father, who reportedly told a relative Rev. Father Denis Ononuju Obiagi that he told the police to arrest Nonso. He was however to apply for his son's bail two days later.

Chief Nwabuba is being accused by her daughter Maureen of deliberately throwing her and the rest of her mother's children off guard by inviting downstairs for 'a family meeting' that was never meant to be. She said that because of her mother's 'precarious situation' in the family, they had long ago secured her apartment upstairs and that it would have been difficult for the thieves to gain entrance into the top-floor apartment if their father hadn't disorganised their security with that fatal invitation to 'a family meeting'.

Available in large quantity

Swimming Pool Tiles

Mosaic Tiles For building

Different designs in stock

THE SEAL OF QUALITY

Other products

- Exotic Marbles
- Colourful Ceramic Wall & Floor Tiles
- Special Vitrified Tiles
- Exquisite Sanitary Wares
- Pure Granite
- Body Friendly Jacuzzi's
- Original White Cement
- Adhesive & Grout

SHOWROOMS OPEN

Mon - Fri: 8.30am - 5.30pm

Sat: 8.30am - 1.30pm

WISE BUILDERS' CHOICE...

INL IBALEX NIG. LIMITED

LAGOS HEAD OFFICE:
Plot 407/413, Apapa/Oshodi Expressway
Ikasamoje, Lagos.
Tel: 01-4522171, 4523615, 4522979,
0803 402 1072, 0803 402 1074
E-mail: ibalex@ikarimco.cc
WWW: www.ibalex.com

VICTORIA ISLAND
128, Akin Adesola Street,
Victoria Island, Lagos.
Tel: 01-4617786, 4617787,
08033013288
E-mail: ibalex@ikarimco.cc

ABUJA:
Plot 1501, Durban Street, A-6
Off Adetokunbo Ademola Crescent
Off Ahmadu Bello Way, Wuse, Phase 2, Abuja
Tel: 09-5232908, 0803 786 3934
E-mail: manager@ibalex.com

THE BEACON