



THE METROSECTION

Bruised, detained unto death

• Police deny accusations of torturing female complainant who dies in prison custody

IN Benin, the Edo State capital, questions are being asked whether what has happened would not turn out to be another unresolved case of death in police custody.

Among those asking are family members and friends of 32-year old Miss Amanda Uhunmwagho who, two weeks ago and unknown to her family, was detained by the police, taken to court and granted bail, remanded in prison custody and while waiting to meet her bail conditions, suddenly died.

The family members would not be consoled. They are praying for a thorough investigation, as they allege that their daughter, the ninth child in the family died due to lack of access to medical care following the torture she received at the hands of police officers at the Aideyan Police Station, Government Reservation Area (GRA), Benin.

A graduate of Economics and Statistics of the University of Benin and a s worker in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Amanda, it is being claimed by her family, was detained and tortured by the police on August 26 when she went to enquire on a case of fraud she lodged at the station.

It was gathered she had a disagreement with the police which escalated into a fight during which she was beaten to a state of unconsciousness.

The police thereafter detained and charged her with assault.

The lady was said to have complained that the Investigating Police Officer (IPO) in her case, a constable, identified as Vero Ijeamaka was conniving with the suspect she complained about and has refused to appear in court even long after other witnesses' testimonies had been taken.

She was said to have also demanded from the IPO her international passport which was the subject of the case.

But the policewoman was said to have insisted that she could not release the passport as it would serve as exhibit in court.

"As it became apparent to Amanda that the IPO was now colluding with the accused person and therefore not willing to come and testify, Amanda threatened to report the conduct of the IPO to a higher authority.

This infuriated the IPO who started pouring abuses on Amanda"

According to the family counsel who is also her uncle, Abraham Uhunmwagho, the police at the station tortured her and inflicted injuries all over her body and dumped her in the cell in a semi-unconscious state.

"The Divisional Police Officer (DPO) and the Divisional Crime Officer (DCO) were in the office and the police at the counter beat the hell out of her, leaving her to bleed profusely.

"She was dumped in the cell naked and she spent the night semi-unconscious.

"When she regained consciousness, she appealed to the police that she was on medication and should be allowed to contact her family all of which fell on deaf ears."

The police, the lawyer said, had seized her phones and she could not reach her family.

He also alleged that the police hurriedly framed charges against her the following day and brought her before a Magistrate Court in Benin in chains where she was granted bail.

He alleged that the police hurriedly took her to prison custody without waiting for the lawyer who volunteered to arrange her bail in the court.

Uhunmwagho said the family members tried to reach her through her line but was unsuccessful and that the line went dead the following day which now caused great anxiety in her family and a search for her began.



• Amanda

From Alemma-Ozioruva Aliu, Benin

He said her office was contacted and on Monday, August 31, after the incident, himself and Amanda's father were going to the police station to make a formal report when they were called by the INEC State Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) who broke the news of their daughter's death to them.

The REC, according to him told them that prison officials reported the case to their office claiming that they could only identify her through her staff identity card.

"She was dumped in the cell naked and she spent the night semi-unconscious. "When she regained consciousness, she appealed to the police that she was on medication and should be allowed to contact her family all of which fell on deaf ears."

court. But just as I was entering the court premises, I saw a crowd by the park. Then I saw a fair complexioned lady in handcuffs and the police officers were dragging her by her legs and arms.

I now walked up to them and stopped them from harassing and beating her.

"They said she refused going into the court premises. At the same time, she was shouting that she wanted to eat and I told them to allow her. I told them I am a lawyer I will stand for her.

So I took her to a canteen nearby where they gave her rice and she ate.

After she had eaten, they brought her to the court.

"She was incoherent. I looked at her hands, there were blisters, wounds everywhere including on her face.

I wanted to take her pictures, but they refused.

They took her to Court Three where I stood for her.

She was granted bail but unfortunately within that short space in time, there was nobody actually to stand as surety.

That was why she was taken to prison.

We now agreed that by Friday or Saturday we would have been able to meet all the terms.

But unfortunately on Monday morning, the magistrate called me that the young lady I stood for, had died in prison custody"

But reacting to the incident, the State Police Command spokesman, Peter Ogboi said the police would not accept responsibility for Amanda's death because she did not die in police custody as she was duly handed over to prison authorities.

He said the prison service had a tradition of not accepting any fresh inmates with bruises or those fatally assaulted or tortured.

"They don't accept. I am very sure that at the time she was being remanded, there was nothing indicating that. So to say that the police killed her when there is no autopsy report, I think that some people may be in too much of a hurry to accuse the police of wrong-doing.

"I wonder how some people come to a conclusion of the cause of death without expert opinion,

I wonder how somebody will come to a conclusion of death after about two weeks of charging this same person to court.

We must not be in a hurry to make some outlandish comments.

"I sympathise with family that they are bereaved, but again, it is not enough to find who should be the scapegoat."

He said it was surprising that the deceased could be away from home for days during which she was not seen by family members, yet they did not make any report at any police station.

He said Amanda's case was that of 'serious assault' on a police officer when she tried to force the police return her international passport said to have been seized and which was the issue in the matter she reported that was being investigated.

However, the autopsy report issued at the Police Medical Services and signed by Dr. Wilson Akhiwu, dated September 4th revealed that the primary cause of her death was 'diabetes mellitus' and the secondary cause as 'pneumonia and lung abscess'.

Brief

Amusa Aderogba for burial

THE death has occurred of Pastor Amusa Adebajo Aderogba, on Sunday, August 28, 2009 at his residence, No. 9, Stella Osholake Street, Ajao Estate, Isolo, Lagos. He was aged 62 years.

A retired banker and successful businessman and