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Monday, September 21, 2009

Bayo Ohu, The Guardian's reporter, murdered

By Kamal Tayo Oropo

IT was another gruesome murder in Nigeria yesterday. The Guardian's Assistant News Editor and an ace political reporter, Bayo Ohu, was shot dead in his apartment in Egbeda, a Lagos suburb.

Ohu was just getting set to attend Church service after seeing off his wife, Ochuko, and sister-in-law, to the early morning service when the gunmen came knocking on his door at about 6.52 a.m.

According to eye-witnesses, the five or six men came in a white Toyota Camry saloon car, wearing white flowing gowns with matching skull caps. They made no attempt to enter any other apartment in the four-flat house. Ohu heard a knock on his door and as he opened the front door to ask who was knocking, the gunmen hit him with a volley of bullets. His blood made a huge splash all over the door. He staggered back into the house screaming for help, but his assailants followed him inside and rained more bullets into him.

Curiously, the assailants made away with only his laptop and mobile phone handset.

The landlady, who was just opening her shop that morning, was the first to come in contact with the assailants. She was ordered to lie face down by a man she identified as the leader of the gang. He warned her in Yoruba language to stay in that position if she didn't want any harm to come to her. She narrated in Yoruba: "The man went ahead to show me a big gun hidden under his flowing gown and I started pleading with him that he should please have mercy on me, that I had no money and was just a poor trader who sells soft drinks. He just told me not to worry, that nothing would happen to me if I stayed face down on the ground. From my shop, he started shouting orders to others." Soon after she was deafened by the gunshots.

The Guardian confirmed that no less than a dozen rounds of ammunition were fired. The police recovered most of the expended bullets.

One bullet went through the right side of Ohu's chest and exited through the left side, tearing through the arm. Two of Ohu's children, who were yet to go to church, had gone to fetch water from another house in the neighbourhood, ran into the assailants and were immediately chased into hiding. Those watching the gory scene from adjoining buildings said that the assailants, after completing their task, still had enough time to wash their hands and feet while two of their colleagues fired shots into the air to scare all in the neighbourhood.

One of the children told The Guardian that from her hiding place he

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heard one of the assailants shouting out jubilantly to his colleagues: "Olori buruku e ti ku (the fool is dead)."

But Bayo Ohu, a hefty six-footer, did not go down without a fight for life. One of his neighbours who rushed to his side after the assailants made their exit, noticed that his pulse was still strong and he was still breathing. Other neighbours were quickly mobilised to save his life. They rushed him to a nearby hospital, just three minutes drive from Ohu's residence. At the hospital, the staff on duty insisted on a Police Report before any first aid could be administered on him. Noticing that he was losing much blood, the neighbours decided to head to the Ikeja General Hospital. Ohu, however, did not make it there as doctors pronounced him dead on arrival.

"There is no doubt that this is a clear assassination job. I have been in the police force for a long time and the kind of expended bullet cartridges found at the scene of the crime is really a source of worry. These are high caliber bullets that are not normal when attacking harmless people. You only go with this kind of weapon where you expect resistance, where you are going with the intent of war. It's not a regular thing", a police source said yesterday.

He then added in a tone dripping with frustration: "There is no cartridge that has the same groove pattern. The groove pattern on each bullet is akin to finger-prints. So, if we were in a situation where police jobs are made easier with good investigative capacity, the bullets could be used in locating the guns and sources, but my friend you know how things are here."

Speaking later with journalists, the Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Frank Mbah, said that the Force was looking at the case from the point of view of the gruesome circumstances, "we are leaving all options open in our investigations." Mbah also said that with more evidence coming to the Force after the recovery of the vehicle used in the operation, things were beginning to point to a possible case of armed robbery. But he quickly added that all leads were being followed.

A shaken Editor and Deputy-Editor in Chief of The Guardian, Debo Adesina, who had rushed to the General Hospital to ensure Ohu's prompt treatment, an effort which now turned out futile, told journalists that, "it is now left for the Police to do their job. I hope they would unravel this killing and let Nigerians know who did this as well as why?"

The Lagos State Commissioner of Police, Marvel Akpoyibo, said that the police had already commenced investigation into the death, added: "We have commenced investigations into the killing. We are investigating a case of murder and robbery. We sympathise with our friend, The Guardian for what happened, we shall investigate the death discretely."

Shock and fear enveloped Ohu's residence as neighbours gathered around discussing the killing yesterday. Bayo Ohu, according to neighbours, was a very quiet person. "You never would know whether he lived in this house or not. He was not the regular kind of person known to everyone. He went about his life quietly. In fact, his wife and kids are better known in this area than he was", one of the neighbours told The Guardian.

One other neighbour watching the scene said: "The whole thing looked like a home video. We saw them, the way they made a U-turn with their car on a narrow road, the way they held their guns and shooting as if they were robbing a bank, was so shocking. We could

not react immediately because we were shocked and we were scared. I just went blank. It was after they drove off that we could summon courage to check who their victim was."

Oyeniji Street, and the surrounding Odukoya Estate, though with one or two nice looking buildings, is generally a lower middle-class neighbourhood. Ohu's residence is an old-fashioned four-flat house, each flat with three bedrooms.

Meanwhile, Ohu's body has been deposited at the mortuary of the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital. He left behind five children; the eldest being 16 years, while the youngest is nine months old, a housewife, who is a part-time student of the Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye and an aged father.

Ogunbayo Ohu was born on June 18, 1964. He started his education at the Local Authority Primary School, Iseyin, Oyo State, from where he proceeded to Progressive Grammar School, Ado-Awaye, also in Oyo State, where he finished in 1976. He had his tertiary education at The Polytechnic, Ibadan between 1988-1990.

Bayo Ohu joined The Guardian in 1991 and distinguished himself early as a reporter. He covered Katsina State as a State Correspondent and his performance recommended him for promotion to Assistant News Editor. His flair for reporting made him move from the desk back to the beat to cover politics which he did very well.

Yesterday, publisher of The Guardian, Dr. Alex Ibru, said he was saddened by the incident and hoped the police would do a thorough job of investigating this killing. He prayed for the peaceful repose of the soul of Ohu and sent his condolences to his family.

Ohu's was yet another in the list of journalists' murder. Dele Giwa, Editor-in-Chief of Newswatch magazine, was killed through a parcel bomb on October 19, 1986 during the military regime of President Ibrahim Babangida.

More recently, Godwin Agbroko, the Editorial Board Chairman of ThisDay newspaper, was gunned down on Oshodi-Mile Two Expressway in 2006 on Christmas eve.

Yet, another mysterious death was that of Abayomi Ogundeji, also a member of the Editorial Board of ThisDay newspaper on August 17, 2008. He was shot in his vehicle on his way from work late in the evening.

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