

TheMetroSection

Widow of slain tanker driver laments that his alleged killers are still free

A phone call to death

A tanker driver, on his way to deliver to customers in Asaba gets a phone call urging him to return quickly to Effurun for a meeting.

He does, only to be shot dead a few minutes after. Now, almost three and half months after, his grieving wife is still crying for justice.

From Chido Okafor, Warri

ON Friday April 16, 2010, 38-year-old Patrick Avbunudo, the chairman of the Association of Young Tanker Drivers of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) went to deliver a consignment of petroleum products to a client in Asaba, Delta State when he received a telephone call.

The caller was a colleague and a member of the executive committee urging him to return to Effurun immediately.

There was an emergency meeting and it was mandatory that he, Avbunudo should attend, being the chairman, the caller stressed. Though he had planned to return to Effurun on Sunday July 18, 2010, Avbunudo changed his mind and decided to return earlier in order to attend the meeting.

But, unfortunately, he did not live to attend any meeting as an armed gang, masquerading as a vigilante group in the Dumurie area of Effurun, in Uvwie Local Council, reportedly shot him twice, in the chest and in the face on Sunday morning, and he died.

According to a forensic report by Police pathologist, Dr. Wilson Akhiwu, the late Avbunudo was shot twice, first with a rifle and then a shotgun.

"Gunshot wounds (rifle and shotgun) to face and chest, lacerating lung and heart with cardiac tamponade", Akhiwu wrote.

Now, it has emerged that the killing may not be unconnected with the power tussle in the Young Tanker Drivers' Association and the late Avbunudo's wife, Ejiro Avbunudo is praying that justice be done and her husband's killer be brought to book.

Narrating her ordeal to *The Guardian*, a weeping Ejiro Avbunudo, said: "My husband was a petroleum tanker driver. He worked with Victory Joe Nigeria Limited, Osubi Road, Effurun. He was

also a member of National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers, (NUPENG).

"On April 16, my husband traveled to Asaba to discharge products to a customer.

"At about 11 pm a group of about 30 or so youths from the other side of the road, called Dumurie quarters, including the chairman of the vigilante group, came to our house.

"I was sleeping, but when I heard their noise, I woke up. They were singing and later left.

"In the morning, my husband's 85 year-old grandmother who lives with us, discovered that the youths damaged the tap with which she sells water, from her borehole. I called somebody to fix the tap.

"I was expecting my husband on Sunday, so I was surprised when he arrived to meet us outside the house as we were fixing the tap damaged the previous night.

"When I asked him why he came back, he said a member of the executive called that he must return as there was an emergency meeting he must attend.

"But when my husband called the member asking if he could come to the meeting venue, the reply was in the negative.

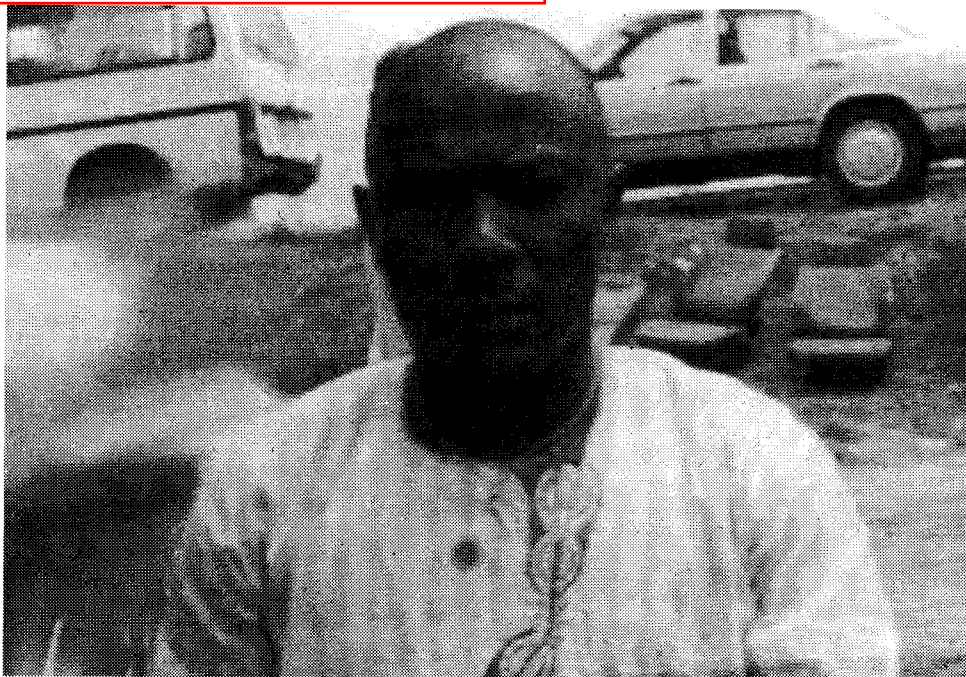
The man even told my husband the meeting would not hold and that it has been rescheduled for the next day.

"The next day, that man came to our house and informed my husband that they should take a walk within the neighbourhood.

"About 20 minutes after they left, there were sporadic gunshots from different directions and people began to shout in panic, running helter skelter for their lives."

She said it was in the midst of the chaos and fear that, their neighbor ran into their apartment and informed her that her husband had been shot by armed vigilante group in the street.

She told *The Guardian* that when they rushed to the scene they saw her husband in the arms of one woman Mama



Late Patrick Avbunudo



Mrs Avbunudo and one of her sons...

Ayo and her husband who witnessed the shooting and tried helping the dying Patrick, but were warded off by the armed group.

All effort to help the injured man were useless as he died shortly.

Eyewitnesses at the scene of the shooting identified the members of the local vigilante as being responsible following which their leader was arrested and taken to Ekpan Police Station.

But according to Mrs Ejiro, the vigilante leader was released after the intervention

the council chairman who told the police the vigilante boss was with him during the incident and not in the vicinity of the shooting.

But the legal counsel to Mrs Ejiro petitioned the Assistant Inspector General of Police Zone Five, Benin City, and again, the leader of the vigilante group was arrested only to be released again.

The development has created immense worry for the family of the deceased who now feel that justice was evading them.

They equally fear that more killings may take place in the

area as the armed group was still harassing residents of the area.

When *The Guardian* contacted the Ekpan Police station, a senior officer said the matter had been taken over by the Delta State Police Command, the spokesman of which confirmed receipt of a matter involving the fatal shooting of a tanker driver.

He said investigations were going on, while a grieving Ejiro pleads for justice as, according to her "my husband's killers are still walking about free."

Yobe to procure tricycles for public transportation of women

From Njadvare Musa, Damaturu

CONTRARY to the Sharia legal system in Yobe State, women are being exposed to the risks of commuting on motorcycles, while others now ride in the same taxis and buses with men which contravenes the tenets of Sharia, the Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development, Hajiya Asma'u Kabir Kolo has said.

The Commissioner who spoke on Saturday at the All Nigeria Peoples Party grand rally and reception for Governor Ibrahim Gaidam at Geidam, said women's participation in active politics cannot be actualised without their protection from exposure, while commuting to work and markets in public transport.

According to the commissioner, many married women, contrary to the

Sharia in Yobe State are however, exposed to the general public on motorcycles, buses and taxis.

She said that married women, under the Sharia legal system are not supposed to mix or commute with other people to their work places and markets.

She said because of the non-existence of special public transportation system for women as obtained in Sharia states of Zamfara,

Kebbi, Kano, Sokoto and Jigawa, tricycles would now be provided for their use by the state government.

The use of tricycles by women, she added, would not only be convenient for married women, but in compliance with the Sharia legal system in the state.

The commissioner therefore urged Governor Gaidam to quickly intervene and assist married Muslim women by procur-

ing and distributing tricycles to the 17 local council areas.

Responding, Gaidam said married women were not supposed to mix with the general public while commuting to their work places and markets.

He gave an assurance that before the end of the year, each of the councils would be provided with tricycles to be exclusively used for married women.

Tolulope Ibukun wins ASMAF scholarship

By David Ibemere

THE dreams of 23-year-old undergraduate, M Olubamido Tolulope Ibukun to become a medical doctor, inched closer to realisation when she recently won the Ajesola Solaja Majekodunmi Foundation (ASMAF) scholarship.

The foundation provides assistance to intelligent, talented but less-privileged Nigeria women to achieve their the Ajesola Solaja Majekodunmi Foundation (ASMAF) has awarded scholarship to M Olubamido Tolulope Ibukun.

Speaking at the award ceremony at the National Sickle Cell Centre in Ibadan recently, the founder Professor Ajesola Solaja Majekodunmi said: "The scholarship provides financial assistance for professional course tertiary level, up to six years life skills, leadership development programme including mentoring and access to resources that provide useful information and tools that encourage academic excellence and lifelong learning."

She said ASMAF determined to facilitate the development of top quality female Nigerian professionals and leaders through assistance to those who are financially handicapped and also increase the representation of females in Accountancy, Architecture, Engineering, Law and Medicine, where they are currently underrepresented.

The foundation also hopes to contribute towards the development of future leaders and ensure a better future for successive generations of Nigerians. She urged the recipient not to relent on her efforts to achieve success and to face her challenges with zeal to see her goals in life.

Member, Board of Trustees Professor Olusoga Sofoluwa said that the board has pinned to offer scholarship to eight applicants but could only award to just one because others did not meet the requirements.

He explained: "In selecting the awardees, we looked at social behaviour, course of study and geographical area. Out of 53 applicants, nine showed up."

Beaming with smiles, the 300 levels Medical student of Lagos State University College of Medicine, M Olubamido Tolulope Ibukun thanked the founder for the opportunity to realise her dream.

"Getting admission to the university was difficult. At a point I nearly gave up but was encouraged by my mother. I never knew that one day, I will be chosen from among many. I am grateful to the Foundation for making it possible for me to work towards achieving my dreams," she remarked.