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Only justice can assuage our son's extrajudicial murder, says Okoli family

By Oluwaseun Akingboye, Akure on January 11, 2016 12:45 am

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Okoli

LITTLE did the family of a motorcycle rider, popularly known as 'Okada' know that the ban of commercial motorcycles in Akure metropolis by Governor Olusegun Mimiko, which took effect on the midnight of July 24, 2015, will forever be a nightfall in the life of their son, Benjamin Okoli.

The Ondo State government banned the activities of commercial motorcyclists in the metropolis after a protest led to massive destruction of public property worth millions of naira.

Okoli, 24, was arrested and arraigned for contravening the restriction on commercial motorcycle, but was murdered in an extra judicial manner five months ago by a Nigeria Prison Service (NPS) official.

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He was reportedly shot by an unknown prison guard on the premises of Olukayode Magistrate's Court after he had been re-arrested for trying to escape, though his lawyer was working on his bail.

His elder brother, Emmanuel Okoli, who spoke with The Guardian, recounted that Benjamin was arrested by NSCDC officials on his way home along Arakale, where he had gone to buy fuel.

Emmanuel said he was handed over to men of the Ondo State Criminal Investigation Department (SCIB) of the Nigeria Police for violating a state order by which temporarily put a ban on commercial motorcycle.

Consequently, he said the deceased was detained for 10 days before he was finally arraigned at the Olukayode Magistrate's Court on August 5, 2015.

According to him: "The lawyer we engaged was able to secure his bail based on the stringent condition and that was what we were trying to sort out when my brother tried to escape, which I think, was a fallout of the inhuman treatment he had all through his illegal detention at Olokuta Medium Prison, prior to his being docked.

"He was, however, caught alive immediately; unharmed, unarmed and returned to the Black Maria that brought him to prison that day in the presence of everybody, though badly beaten and mercilessly tortured," he said.

"Some minutes later," the bereaved continued, "we heard some gun shots right there and that was the last we saw or heard about of our brother."

He said the NPS suspect and his colleagues sensed what happened and rushed his late brother to the State Specialist Hospital, Akure where he was pronounced dead and dumped his remains in the morgue.

He described the victim: "He was a very hard working young man, was into tiles fixing and rode motorcycle to augment for himself and the family.

"We were forced to cough out N42,000 for the autopsy after which we had to raise another money for his burial in Kogi State."

He admitted that life has not remained the same for the family since the death of its breadwinner, after he was allegedly cut in his prime by an overzealous prison warder, five months ago.

Emmanuel lamented that it has been difficult to get to the warder and ask him to tell the whole world why "he murdered my brother in cold blood and continue to evade justice."

He groaned that their aged parents' health has deteriorated greatly since the incident, while his siblings have not been finding it easy to pay their school fees.

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The family counsel, Orlu Mills, who showed a copy of the petition sent to the police commissioner to The Guardian, vowed to pursue the case to a logical conclusion.

His words: "Information at our disposal showed that the warder, who shot Benjamin was just was a trigger-happy cop as he was not among those who pursued him in the initial place.

"We are aware the police have commenced investigation into the matter and have requested the prison authorities to hand over the warder but to no avail.

"We foresee a conspiracy by the Olokuta Prison authorities by extension, the Nigeria Prison Service to sweep the matter under the carpet.

There must be an end to impunity, and extrajudicial killings if this country must progress. Nobody is about the law of the land.

Ondo Police spokesperson, Tunde Ogundare, pledged to further investigation into the matter and assured that justice will take its full course.

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