

Protest in Rivers as task force kills Keke operator

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• CP warns vigilance groups

There was pandemonium in Ogbogoro community in Obio-Akpor Council of Rivers State, as ‘Keke Napep’ operators protested against alleged killing of their member by a local task force over refusal to pay N200 daily fees.

The Guardian gathered that the victim, aged 26, whose identity could not be confirmed at press time, had conveyed a passenger to Ogbogoro junction, when the leader of the community task force, popularly known as Osisioma, stopped him and demanded N200 daily fees.

It was learnt that the task force leader and his members hit the Keke operator a number of times on his chest when he argued that he just resumed work and had no N200 to give them. The torture made him gasp for breath.

He was reportedly rushed to a nearby hospital, where he allegedly died and the task force took his corpse away.

Speaking with newsmen, his brother, who is also a Keke rider, said they had complained of continuous harassment and torture by the task force in the area but nobody listened to them.

He called for the release of his brother’s corpse and urged the state government and security agencies to intervene in the activities of the community boys.

MEANWHILE, the state Commissioner of Police, Nwonyi Emeka, has read the riot act to vigilante groups in the state.

The commissioner warned them against extorting, detaining or torturing suspects.

He gave the warning during a stakeholders' meeting in Rivers East Senatorial District.

Nwonyi, however, acknowledged the role vigilantes play in fighting crime in Rivers State, but stressed that despite their effort in assisting the police in curbing crime, the command would not tolerate excesses.

He said: "We like their contributions, but we emphasise we will not condone their excesses. We will not tolerate jungle justice from vigilantes. We cannot have a group of people to protect life and property, and the same are the ones killing the people.

"Tyrannical activities of vigilantes must be curtailed. For instance, we will not tolerate a situation where they turn to debt collectors, flogging people. Your duty is to arrest and share information. You don't have the power to detain and investigate.

"If a person is condemned by the court for hanging, and the person is shot, the person who shot him has committed murder."

He insisted that vigilantes must not go beyond their mandate and that traditional rulers, police and council chairmen must monitor their activities.

Similarly, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Victor Erivwede, in charge of the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department (SCIID) said: "There are many human rights abuses by the vigilance group. Vigilance group or OSPAC started well but started derailing when they began to take contracts from political leaders. If I have my way I will tell the CP to review the OSPAC and vigilance group. Many of the OSPAC members are criminals.

"I have a case, where a vigilante member shot a man dead because the man spoke to his girlfriend."