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① Pandemonium in Mile 2 as Task Force allegedly kills driver, pedestrian

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THERE was pandemonium yesterday at Mile 2 area of Lagos, following the killing of a truck driver and a passerby by men suspected to be officers of the Lagos State Environmental Sanitation and Special Offences Enforcement Unit, popularly known as Task Force. The Guardian learnt that the deceased persons fell to the bullet of police officers, who were allegedly in company of Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA), when they stormed Mile 2 at about 2:00 a.m.

It was alleged that the officials in uniform had stormed the area in commando style to arrest truck drivers and extort them, but the met stiff resistance.

While it has remained uncertain whether the officials were attached to Lagos or Federal Task Force, as both agencies have denied involvement in the fracas, both the Nigerian Army and Police were deployed to the scene to restore normalcy as calm returned to the area at about 11:00 a.m.

Police officers and soldiers were also stationed at the scene after the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, Idowu Owohunwa, visited the area to assess the situation.

An eyewitness, John Stephen, told The



Empty road with bon fire yesterday.

Guardian that the men usually come in the night, at least once in two months, to disturb the area and harass truck drivers.

He said: "The people killed our brothers. Police Task Force officers and LASTMA came in a *Korope* (mini-bus) and a Toyota Hilux Van and started arguing with the truck driver.

"They asked the driver to alight from the truck to allow them towed it to their station at about 2:00a.m. The driver pleaded with them that he was going to Wharf to load, but they didn't listen and started beating

• Agencies deny killing

him.

"They started struggling with him and after some minutes, they shot him. The driver was rushed to the hospital, but they rejected him. They said they could not attend to him without a police report. So, he was brought back that night. Why are they here in the night like armed robbers? What did we do to them?"

"The driver's wife just gave birth a week ago and now they killed him. Police also came at about 7:00 a.m. and

started shooting. They also shot a hustler like us."

The witness added: "The police officers were ready to kill more if not for the intervention of soldiers who came from a nearby barracks, and the policemen denied all their actions. "They killed one person the same way last year and the Task Force always comes with area boys under Obalende Bridge to do their operations and disturb our peace. "Police gun is to protect and not to murder people just

anyhow, but it's different here."

Speaking with The Guardian, spokesperson for Lagos State Police Command, Benjamin Hundeyin, said the officers were not from the Command, stressing that investigation was ongoing to unravel the situation.

Also, chairman of Lagos Task Force, Shola Jejeloye, has disassociated his officers from the killing, saying his men were not posted out yesterday for environmental or traffic operations.

He said: "The attention of the Lagos State Task Force has been drawn to a report making rounds that officials

of the Agency were involved in the killing of an unidentified individual along Mile 2 axis yesterday morning.

"The Agency would like to clearly state that none of its personnel were posted out for operations today except for officers posted to Freedom Park, Ojota, and Maryland to maintain peace and orderliness where a rally by the Nigerian Labour Congress had been scheduled.

"None of our men were posted out today for environmental and traffic operations, rather they were only posted to Freedom Park to maintain peace and orderliness during the planned NLC rally, so that miscreants and other sinister forces do not hijack the protest. "Our operational jackets are clearly branded with unique identification numbers for members of the public to recognize during our operations.

Meanwhile, the Council of Maritime Transport Unions and Associations (COMTUA) has condemned the killing of a truck driver at the Mile 2.

COMTUA said the incident has not only taken the life of an individual but has also sent shockwaves throughout the transportation community.

The group said the loss of a fellow truck driver, who was merely carrying out his duties, was disheartening, and a blow to the entire industry.