

Rumpus At UNN As Police Kill Senior Staff

By Oguwike Nwachuku
GROUP NEWS EDITOR

Confusion has seized University of Nigeria, Nsukka

(UNN), following the alleged killing of a senior staff of the institution by police in the area.

The source of concern to members of the university

community is that the police put a gun on the victim, Titus Chukwu Ezereonwu, after allegedly killing him to create the impression that he was an armed robber.

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Sunday Independent gathered that Ezereonwu was a senior non-academic staff of the university attached to the Faculty of Education.

Until two years ago, he was said to be the Secretary of the Department of Archaeology.

Trouble reportedly started for the deceased when he went to attend to some security issues at his Tectonics Road neighbourhood district in Nsukka, where he was secretary of the vigilance group.

According to his daughter, Mrs. Jane Odoo, her late father got a report that some streetlights in the neighbourhood had gone bad and so decided to arrange how to fix the light through the help of the vigilance group in charge of the day's surveillance.

The daughter said while her father and the others were still identifying the bad ones, they heard a gun shot and in the apprehension, Ezereonwu used his cell phone to call the police.

According to her, no sooner had the police team arrived than one of them pulled his gun at his father and shot him. He died on the spot.

Another member of the vigilance group, who was shot in the leg, by the police team is said to be receiving medical treatment at the Obayi Memorial Hospital at Nsukka, with the police detectives keeping surveillance.

Mrs. Odoo further disclosed

that in order to cover their track, the police carried the corpse of the deceased to their office in Nsukka, where they put a gun on him as an armed robber.

They also wrote a report to justify their action.

But all along, it was gathered, the police were ignorant of the identity of the man they killed.

However, things took a different dimension when the university community staged a protest and demanded an explanation on how the deceased, who was known to them for several years, became an armed robber in just one night.

The immediate past Dean, Faculty of Education, UNN, Rev. Fr. (Prof.) Augustine Akubue, the new Dean, Faculty of Education, Prof. Boniface Nworgu, and the Director of the Institute, Prof. David Eze, stormed the Nigeria Police Divisional Headquarters at Nsukka last Tuesday to protest the gruesome killing of Ezereonwu.

Ezereonwu's neighbours on Obayi Avenue, Nsukka, also stormed the office of the Divisional Police Officer (DPO), Mr. J. O. Ohanbanu, shortly after the three professors at the UNN stepped out, to vehemently kick against the killing of Ezereonwu, whom they said was "the life wire of the vigilance group".

Akubue told the *Sunday Independent*: "The suspect who was shot in the leg by the police and is now receiving treatment in

a hospital has made a statement explaining what happened. And the explanation is a rebuttal of the DPO's claim that Ezereonwu was an armed robber.

"The wounded suspect said in his statement to the police that the late Ezereonwu had no gun. And that there were people who had identified the gun placed on the chest of Ezereonwu as the same gun the police had placed on several other persons they killed in the past."

The catholic priest said when they met with the DPO, he had drawn his attention to the large number of Ezereonwu's neighbours massed at the police station.

His words: "I told the DPO that nobody comes to defend an armed robber. It is never done. For the fact that so many people came to the police station showed that the man was not an armed robber. It is like the police acted in a haste and has now found out that its action is condemnable. The police are now saying they fired in self defence. They are still claiming the man had a gun."

When *Sunday Independent* met with the DPO in his office, initially he declined to talk saying only the Commissioner of Police, Charles Dawodu, and the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mike Abattam, were permitted to speak to the press.

But when prodded by the reporter, Ohanbanu, after disclosing that he had sent a signal (situation report) to Abattam in Enugu, said Ezereonwu was a member of an armed robbery gang that had attacked residents of "a house behind Obayi Memorial Hospital on July 31, 2006."

Ezereonwu's wife, Benedette, was still being condoled by women in the neighbourhood when *Sunday Independent* got to the family house in Nsukka.

The widow, who was still in shock, only told *Sunday Independent*: "I saw his dead body at the police station with a gun placed on his chest. I am pleading with everyone to go with me to the police station to convince them that my husband was not an armed robber. He was a titled man who must be given a befitting burial."

Abattam told *Sunday Independent* in an interview in Enugu on Friday that Ezereonwu was a member of an armed robbery gang.

Said the police spokesman: "The police responded and so there was an exchange of gun fire between the police and the armed robbers. One of the armed robbers was shot and fatally wounded while others escaped."

"A single-barrel locally made pistol containing one expended gun and two live cartridges were recovered from the armed robbers."

Asked whether Ezereonwu could be the armed robber who was shot and fatally wounded by the police, Abattam said he could be "as a top official in a university could be a member of an armed robbery gang without anyone knowing about it."

Defending, however, Ezereonwu's daughter said "While the controversy raged, police had accepted that they made a mistake in killing my father. But the overall boss in the area was said to have amended the statement earlier made by members of the team to reflect robbery claim."

"We hear the man said it is to maintain my father was a robber so that they can absolve by their authorities."

Mrs. Odoo, explained that family had lived in Nsukka close to 30 years.

"We were all born and bred Nsukka. The family is still there. My father has not retired and mother is still teaching as a headmistress. How can police our father like that and to justify their inefficiency, put a gun in him?" Although she said university community requested for the corpse to be deposited at the university, the police insisted on keeping the Bishop Sherahan Hospital also in Nsukka.

Meanwhile, Force Public Relations Officer, Haz Iwe said the authorities were yet to inform of the incident.