

Enugu 2007: Ritual Killers On The Prowl In Nsukka

By Uwakwe Abugu
(Who visited Nsukka)

Last Sunday, parishioners of the Holy Redeemer Catholic Church, Nru in Nsukka, Enugu State, who worshipped at the various churches within the parish went home with a fresh apprehension. This was as a result of the announcement that, once again, ritual killers believed to be working for politicians in view of the 2007 general elections were at it again in the area. They are already ravaging parts of the Nsukka senatorial district known as Enugu North in the state's political senatorial delineation scheme. The Priest in charge of the Parish, Rev. Fr. Simeon Ugwueze, who is also the Director, Justice and Peace Commission for the Nsukka Catholic Diocese, made the shocking announcement at a service he conducted at St. Peter's (zone 12) area of the parish.

He told the visibly frightened congregation that already, some five persons had been murdered for ritual purposes in the area in the past few weeks and that the murderous hands of some desperate politicians could be found in the criminal acts. This reporter was a member of the congregation on that fateful Sunday, and our further investigation after the church service enabled us to lay hands on photographs of two of the victims of the on-going gruesome ritual killings in the area. They are a sordid sight to behold.

The people of the area experienced a near similar situation shortly before the 2003 elections, when two teenage students were murdered by the Police who tried to cover their act under the cloak of anti-robbery activities. They were, however, exposed when investigation and public inquest revealed that a divisional police officer who later escaped from custody

masterminded the killing for ritual purposes on the behest of a prominent politician. The Civil Liberties Organisation and the Nsukka Catholic Diocese had embarked on a crusading investigation to expose all those involved in that dastardly act.

For those who closely followed the violent protests that resulted from the killing of the two lads, there was little wonder why apprehension overwhelmed the congregation last Sunday when the priest told them of the new wave of killings as another general election comes around the corner. The victims, whose include Miss Ifeyinwa Eze who hailed from Nkporogu, Umundu in Udenu council area of the state and Comfort Okegbe from Ogbede in Igbo-Ekiti council area.

The diocese under His Lordship, Bishop Francis Okobo has, again, set machinery in motion to get a renewed crusade against the evil acts in place, especially using the churches in the diocese as avenues for enlightenment on the on-going onslaught.

For instance, Ugwueze said, "The church is sensitising the people about what is going on. The picture of this young woman (Ifeyinwa Eze), the church is now duplicating it to pass around all the corners for people to actually see for themselves what is going on. In the case of a woman killed in Ogbede, we are told a policeman is behind the killing".

Asked if he knows whether the said policeman has been apprehended, the priest said, "What the police authorities did was to transfer the man from his duty post to a different location and the church is now trying to request the police to do a thorough investigation into the matter to find out why actually this man who committed this act will

be left to still work in the Police Force which should protect lives and property."

According to him, the church is also fighting to see that the suspect is prosecuted.

The priest gave an overview of the situation in the senatorial district, saying that "what is happening in Nsukka area is quite disheartening to any well-meaning person. Nsukka had been a place where peace, tranquility and cordial co-habitation prevailed among the people; but today, the

reverse is the case owing to the recent happenings."

He gave instances of the latest killings: "A man was killed at Orba. He was removed from his house and killed along the road and his manhood was cut off and made away with."

According to him, "At Obollo-Afor, a girl was killed and her heart removed." That is the case of the deceased Ifeyinwa Eze. Yet, he revealed that at Enugu-Ezike, specifically in Inyi village, a mother was killed and "also at Ohulo in Obollo-Afor, a young man was killed

in front of his house by unknown persons. He was murdered with a dagger."

Like other concerned residents, Rev. Father Ugwueze said, "Clearly, the situation is very bad now in the area. What we are experiencing today has never been happening in Nsukka and any reasonable man or woman in the area is suspecting that now the elections are around the corner, some of those vying for elective posts are behind these ritual killings."

He recalled the aforementioned ritual killing of the two young men in the area in 2003 and said the people should pray fervently to God to avert further shedding of blood of innocent persons.

In the case of the killing of Comfort Okegbe in Ogbede, her father,

Vincent, in a statement narrated how he had gone to the police station at Ogbede along with his relation, Peter Egbu, to complain of the disappearance of his daughter the previous night.

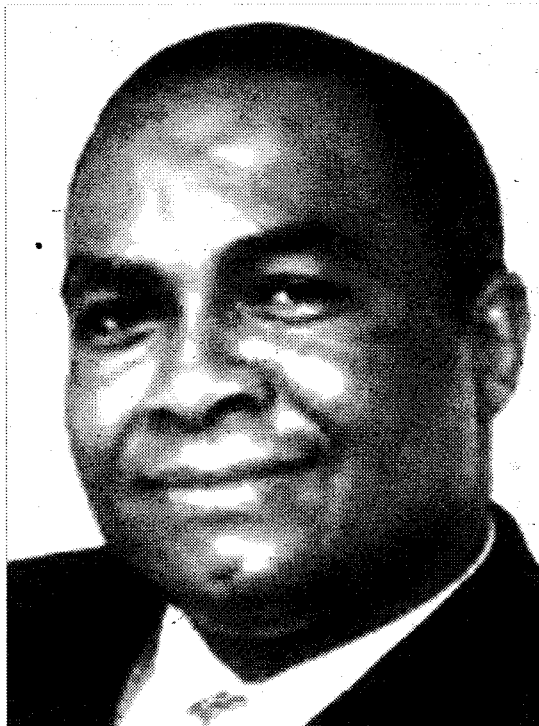
The Divisional Police Officer (DPO) had shocked them with the announcement that she was dead and indeed, gave them some policemen who actually took them to the scene of murder. The traumatised Okegbe said, "As we went there, I saw her dead; her left ankle was broken with big stones, one of her hands was also broken. Her neck was also broken; but the most annoying thing was that her female sex organ was removed entirely."

Although, Mr. Okegbe did not state so, the process of interrogation by the police was such that his family was made to pay N30,000 (thirty thousand naira) supposedly to take care of what a human rights group also investigating the matter called "autopsy fee before they were asked to go and bury their daughter".

The same source also alleged that the tenants who lived in the same compound with the policeman suspected to have killed the woman were also made to part with N11,000 (eleven thousand naira) each before their release two days after they were arrested.

This resurgence of ritual killings believed to be masterminded by politicians is already generating tension on the political terrain in the area, especially as there are very many gubernatorial and other aspirants from the zone clamouring to get the tickets of their respective parties.

Hence, Bishop Okobo and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Diocese are leading in the on-going crusade not only to sensitise the people to be vigilant, but also to appeal to the collective conscience of politicians to remind them of the sanctity of human life.



• Nnamani, Enugu State governor