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Customs denies extra-judicial killing in border community

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By **Segun Adeleye** - Abeokuta

The Comptroller of Customs, Ogun State command, Haruna Mahmud, has refuted the claim by residents of Koko community that his men deliberately shot dead one Timothy Ezekiel during evacuation of smuggled bags of rice from the town and absolved his men of any extra-judicial killing.

While addressing journalists at the state customs command headquarters in Abeokuta, Mahmud explained that the Idi-Iroko axis is notorious for smuggling of contraband especially rice.

According to him, motorcyclists were being engaged by smugglers to bring in rice from Benin Republic to Nigeria, pointing out that efforts by his men to curtail them had led to loss of lives of

officers in the past, hence the decision of the command to design a strategy to evacuate the bags of rice from the destination point.

“The menace of motorcyclists smuggling rice along Idi-Iroko had been a serious concern for the command over time. Before we had tried to stop them at checkpoints but rather would choose to crush any officer on their way.

“These attempts to stop them resulted in serious road accidents, either they would with speed run into on-coming vehicle, which trying to avoid being caught by our operatives, and die in the process,” he stated.

Shedding more light on Koko incident, the comptroller said officers of the command had gone to evacuate about 120 bags of smuggled bags rice at a surveyed spot in the town when they were attacked by local youths and smugglers who were armed with dangerous weapons.

“This is the scenario that played out in Koko village on the 24th of February, 2014. Our officers who had gone to evacuate smuggled bags of rice were attacked by local youths and smugglers who were armed with cudgels, guns, machetes, stones, charms and amulets. They came in their tens, and blocked all exit points with bonfires to prevent our officers from escaping from the area.

“In the ensuing circumstances, our officers shot in the air to scare the advancing hoodlums and surprisingly they released shots from their guns. One person was shot among them, who later died. However, one could not ascertain where the shot that killed the man came from because of the confused situation,” Mahmood submitted.

The comptroller who disclosed that his command has raked in N483 million in the first quarter of the year as revenue from dutiable goods, added that since he resumed office in December 2013, more than 20,000 bags of rice has been seized by the command.

Meanwhile, he stated that investigation into Koko incident was on-going, pointing out “if it was established that the deceased was not part of the mob or smugglers who attacked our men, the command will do the needful as per the recommendations of the stakeholders and elders in the village that had been selected to liaise with the deceased’s family”.

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