



Features

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Victims of police brutality demand justice

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"MY names are Achor Isidore Okechukwu; I am a native of Uga in Aguata L.G.A of Anambra State. I am 51yrs old. On the 10th of May 2014, my club Kegite Club had their yearly carnival known as world gyration, which was hosted by Odumegwu Ojukwu University (formerly Anambra State University) Igbariam Campus. The venue was at Isiagu Royal Garden Awkuzu, close to the university environment and in a public place open to all. Unfortunately at about 6.35pm on that 10th of May, members of Nigerian Police Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) Awkuzu Anambra State, stormed the venue of the club carnival, ordered everybody to sit on the bare floor, then with 2 vehicles (one pick-up truck and a mini bus) took me and around 30 of my members away to their office around 200 meters from our venue. (They made around 2 trips). The officer (I feel he was the most senior around then) asked me what was my mission to the hotel, I told him I came for a club programme; he asked me if am a member of Kegite club.

"I told him that I am not only a member but the leader of the club in 3 states of Anambra, Enugu & Ebonyi. At this stage the owner of the hotel came in and complained openly to the officer the embarrassment to his guests, he said if there is problem he was the person to hold responsible not his guests who came from far & near. He was arrested and given a thorough beating. The officer told him (the hotel owner) that they have a case they are investigating about his hotel. Around 9.30pm we were made to pull off our clothes, wrist - watches and other valuables. Our phones were switched off and taped together with our wallets and money with our names labelled on them. We were allowed to wear only pants and shorts; we were pushed into a dark cell with around 130 people inside. We squatted all through the night because of lack of space.

"At around 7.am, one officer came to the cell and asked all Kegite-club members to come out of the cell to a hall. He told us that we will write statements, paper and pen was provided. He said our



• Opeyemi Illori, President Vote For Service Initiative (left), Abimbola Ushie, Programme Officer Justice 4 All (middle) and Okechukwu Nwanguma, National Coordinator NOPRIN, at the press conference.
Photo: Chukwudi Nweje.

phones shall be given back to us after writing our statement to enable us call our relations to come and bail us. I was still writing my statement when the officer left; when he came back he told us that everybody is now discharged due to intervention of a lawyer, the Chief security officer of Odumegwu Ojukwu University and more than a thousand members of my club who amassed at the gate. Surprisingly no one told me or my people the offence we have committed."

This is just one of the many stories of police abuses and brutality. Allegations of police brutality and abuses are fast becoming rampant in Nigeria. Many who had been arrested for one offence or the other often allege that they were abused or tortured and forced

into signing confessional statements admitting to crimes they know nothing about. All in all, the Police have been accused of highhandedness in the discharge of their duties.

Recently at the Quarterly Press Conference organised by the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN) to highlight and publicise some documented cases of police brutality and abuse in Nigeria, the group which was established in 2000 to provide opportunity for civil society involvement in police reform, and the promotion of safety, security and justice in Nigeria unveiled some of the numerous complaints it has received about abuses by the police, especially the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) formations across the country.

A culture of impunity protects police officers involved in police brutality, extrajudicial killings, corruption and abuse. The Nigerian government has repeatedly expressed willingness to address the problems in the criminal justice system, improve access to justice, and reform the Nigeria Police Force.

NOPRIN is a network of 46 civil society organizations spread across Nigeria, and committed to promoting police accountability and respect for human rights. And, according to the group, many police stations in Nigeria are epicentres of gross human rights violations.

Police and impunity

Since it came into existence, NOPRIN has investigated and documented several cases of police brutality and abuses. According to NOPRIN successive yearly reports by local and international human rights advocacy groups have continued to return the same damning verdicts against the Nigeria police and other security forces for appalling human rights performance. It said it is worrisome that perpetrators of human rights violations are hardly brought to account and impunity is entrenched.

"A culture of impunity protects police officers involved in police brutality, extrajudicial killings, corruption and abuse. The Nigerian government has repeatedly expressed willingness to address the problems in the criminal justice system, improve access to justice, and reform the Nigeria Police Force. However, despite several 'Presidential Committees on Police Reform in Nigeria' in recent years, which presented detailed recommendations for improvement, little has been done.

"Nigerian political authorities endanger public safety by paying lip service to police reform. The continued tolerance of massive human rights abuses by police hierarchy makes it very difficult to achieve change at the lower levels. This is why it is necessary to start changing the whole culture of policing in Nigeria," Okechukwu Nwanguma, National Coordinator, NOPRIN said.

Increasing cases of abuse

In recent time, NOPRIN has received various petitions of police extrajudicial killings and abuses. Among them is the case of how Police Officers at the SARS, Awkuzu, Anambra State at the prompting of one Oyiboka allegedly brutalised and tortured one Ifeanyi Anyanyo to death.

The said Oyiboka is said to have left her matrimonial home in 2008 and returned to her family where she has been a terror to her sick old mother and siblings, using her much vaunted 'police connections'.

There is also the case of a 31 year-old female detainee who was allegedly raped by then Divisional Police Officer (DPO) of Onikan Police Station, Lagos. The lady, a cook at a restaurant was detained overnight at the station after some altercations with her employer when the incident happened.

She had further said that the

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