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Jungle Justice: Father Of Slain Boy Cries Out For Justice

Agbo-Paul Augustine (http://leadership.ng/reporter/agbo-paul-augustine/) — Nov 8, 2014 | 2 Comments (http://leadership.ng/features/389697/jungle-justice-father-slain-boy-cries-justice#comments)

The gale of mob killings in Nasarawa State continues unabated as lives are taken with impunity by lawless individuals. AGBO-PAUL AUGUSTINE writes on the killing of Obinna, a 15 year-old boy by commercial motorcycle operators in Nasarawa town, even as the father cries out for justice

September 18, 2014 came like any other day for the family of Chief Francis Okitie in Tama, a village in Nasarawa local government area of Nasarawa State. The bright warm sunlight that heralded the day ended in sorrows and tears by dusk. This is because 15-year-old Obinna, the fourth of eight children and a secondary school drop-out born to this local construction business man, lost his life violently in the blood-thirsty hands of motorcycle riders who beat him to inertia and later stabbed him to death.

Again, another victim has been claimed by the new wave of jungle justice that has permeated Nasarawa State in past months negating the criminal justice system in the country. Alleged criminals as well as innocent persons, unfortunately, are cut down abruptly to their death by mobs and members of vigilante groups, who mete out justice, without recourse to the law.

When LEADERSHIP Sunday met with Chief Okitie, an indigene of Umuahia North LGA of Abia State, who has lived in Nasarawa for over 30 years, the grieving father could not hold back tears as he cried while narrating the horror that claimed his son on that black day in September.

According to him, Obinna was tending to his poultry farm at the back of the family home when a boy ran through the side of their house and seconds later, an angry mob arrived his house and saw Obinna tending to his poultry.

He said the group asked his son if he knew the boy being chased in the area to which he replied in the affirmative and even told them he knew the boy's house in the neighbourhood. "Late Obinna was asked by the group to help lead them to the suspects house which he obliged without hesitation", Chief Okitie said.

But while on their way to trace the fugitive's house, some men in the group suggested they go to their office at the Nasarawa motor park and by the time they got to the office, other motorcycle riders had gathered waiting for "the captured culprit" whom they mistook for his son.

He narrated further that while the boy was in the custody of the men, his wife was notified of his arrest. "My wife rushed to the park and saw an army of okada riders chanting war songs as she made her way to the office. She identified herself as the mother of Obinna and pleaded his innocence.

"She was forced to communicate in the local dialect to Obinna for all to understand which she did. Obinna explained that he only saw the fleeing boy passing by their house while being chased and that he knew the boy to be from their neighbourhood".

After listening to her son's explanation, Okitie said his wife pleaded to the officials of the motorcycle union to allow her son to go home since he is innocent but according to him, the officials refused and she decided to go to the police station to report the matter.

The police initially detailed an officer to accompany her, but as they were about to leave for the park, someone asked the policeman if he will be able to handle the army of okada riders at the park for which he became afraid of going there alone.

"The police decided to order the officer not to go, claiming that their men are on patrol at Ajaga, some kilometres outside Nasarawa and my wife pleaded with them that the matter was a life and death situation but the police turned deaf ear to her pleas.

"My wife decided to go to the head of vigilante in Tama area but she was advised to go back to the park and on reaching the park, the number of okada riders had swelled. They were so furious and some of them were beating Obinna.

"As she struggled to make her way through the angry crowd, she saw her son pushed outside for all to beat. Obinna ran out as he received beatings from the men as if he was an animal meant for sacrifice.

"He was barely able to escape in spite of the injuries he had sustained; he ran through a narrow space at the park but the furious crowd followed him and finished him up by stabbing him severely with knives and daggers leaving him dead on the main road outside the park," Okitie narrated sadly.

He said the police finally came almost an hour later to evacuate the lifeless body of his son which medical officials at the Nasarawa general hospital had confirmed dead.

"I was summoned through the Eze Igbo of Nasarawa to the police station and there, I was told that the boy was dead and I was free to claim the body," he added.

Chief Okitie said apart from the statement he made at the police station, he never heard any word from the police for three weeks until he went to ask the police why no arrest had been made. The unfavorable response from the Nasarawa police station forced him to go the area commander of the police in Keffi who had no knowledge of the development in Nasarawa even after three weeks.

Rather, the area commander, according to him, was told that late Obinna was lynched for stealing a bag of melon seeds from the market.

However, when LEADERSHIP Sunday visited Nasarawa motor park, there was a warning by the motorcyclists' association to steer clear off the matter. The spokesman of the area command, Ismaila Numan told LEADERSHIP Sunday that after four weeks, he was yet to be briefed on the matter. He, however, promised to act on it.

Further investigation revealed that three suspects have been arrested by the police and transferred to the command's headquarters in Lafia. Efforts by LEADERSHIP Sunday to get further clarification from the PPRO in Lafia were futile as calls made were rejected repeatedly and no reply to the text messages sent.

Meanwhile, the family of Chief Okitie has been receiving threat messages from unknown people forcing him to evacuate his family from Nasarawa to Abuja to avoid another disaster. "I have lived in Nasarawa for over 30 years; all my children were born in Nasarawa and it hurts to see this type of disaster befalling my family", he said.

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According to him, his prayers is to find justice for his late son who was cut short abruptly at a tender age of 15.

Speaking on the matter, the vice president, Igbo community in Nasarawa town, Mr Patrick Ubanozie said the traders protested the killing of Obinna with a one-day closure of their stores to bring the attention of the traditional and security leaders of Nasarawa to the senseless killing. He said while the Igbo community remained committed to peace in Nasarawa, they all craved for justice for the victim's family.

Late Obinna's body remains in the mortuary in Nasarawa as the Igbo community say they will not bury the body until they have received the autopsy report being awaited.


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