

Residents Oppose Court Ruling On Alleged Killers Of Church Members

By **Okem Mbah** 2 days ago News

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A Bayelsa State High Court ruling has stirred widespread anger and sorrow after it freed two men accused of killing a man, his wife and two other members of a church at Azikoro community in August, 2020.

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The court, presided over by Justice I. Eradiri, dismissed the 16-count charge of murder, attempted murder, illegal arms possession and malicious damage against Dankaba Sinime (39) and Dawereghe Raymond (28), citing that their confessional statements were obtained under duress, which violates the Evidence Act.

The ruling, which was delivered on Thursday, stunned the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) and the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Iyobosa Apulu and the operatives of the Bayelsa State Police Command, who were present in the court.

Though one of the defence lawyers tried to thank the judge, Justice Eradiri cut him short, saying bluntly, "Four persons died." When asked about the AK-49 rifle reportedly recovered from the accused, the judge ordered that it be handed over to the State Commissioner of Police for safekeeping.

Outside the courtroom, grief turned to rage as heartbroken relatives of the victims openly cried and rolled on the ground, cursing and accusing the justice system of betrayal.

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They called on Governor Douye Diri and the Attorney General of the State, Biriya Dambo (SAN) to intervene and revisit the judgment by ensuring that the murdered persons get justice.

A church member, Mr. Stephen, told LEADERSHIP Weekend that the ruling was a setback for justice.

"Our murdered brothers and sisters were denied justice today by the court. The way the justice system in Bayelsa recycles criminals is contributing to crime in the state. Witnesses identified these accused and the police and the State Justice Ministry found them culpable but the judge found them innocent of all the charges. It is pathetic," he said.

The attack happened on August 5, 2020, at about 11pm, when suspected cultists invaded the Lion of Judah Church, killing four church members; Alfred Marcus, 30; Imomotimi (surname unknown), 25; Gabriel Ejimofor, 45 and Uchechukwu Ejimofor, 38. They also burnt a nearby building, damaged a vehicle and the church property.

Operatives of Operation Puff Adder had earlier traced the hideout of the cultists in the bush, dislodged them and burnt their camp. An AK-49 rifle was recovered from the accused persons who, in their confessional statements written by them and under video coverage, admitted being members of the notorious cult group, the Bobos.