

NEWS

How police shot at me, by 'good samaritan'

•Victim relives encounter at checkpoint

FROM his hospital bed, a victim of alleged police brutality has spoken about how he was shot while playing the Good Samaritan. Mr Ojo Igbinoba is at the Edo State Central Hospital, where doctors are battling to save his life. Mr. Barnabas Onyejelem was not as lucky as Igbinoba; he died in the encounter with policemen at Iguovenwen, near Benin City, Ovia North East Local Government Area.

It was at a road block mounted by five policemen.

Igbinoba's July 25 ordeal started when the driver of a bus in which he was traveling, stopped the vehicle to ascertain what the matter was between two commuters and the policemen on duty.

The passengers alighted from the bus and met the policemen allegedly beating up a bus driver who was said not to be prompt in responding to the demands of the police officers, Igbinoba explained.

Everybody at the scene started shouting: "Leave the driver alone!", on account of the beating the driver was receiving from the police officers, Igbinoba explained.

Igbinoba said: 'I was trying to prevail on the policemen to leave the driver alone when they grew angry and started shooting sporadically into the air to scare people away. After that, three of them zoomed off with the car they came in.'

"The remaining two were not allowed to go. They stopped a motorcyclist to convey them but, we told the man not to. He asked them to get on the bike and they did. As they were about to move, they fell but they picked up again, to escape. Before they got on the bike again, they pointed their guns towards where we were standing and pulled the trigger. They fired and it hit me in my hand. It was in the midst of the crowd."

"I now ran out to hold the man who fired at me and showed him my hand. I told him that he had no where to go. I told him also that he had to treat me."

He said I should go back. The bike man who had fallen before was up this time around. He asked the policemen to get on the bike again, but I held the policeman who shot me and dragged him down. He threatened to shoot me again.

"Really, he pointed the gun at me and pulled the trigger again, but I dodged it. That was how he killed one man. At this point, people gathered the more and held him down because he had killed somebody. His gun was taken from him and taken to the station", Igbinoba added.

Asked if he could identify the slain man, Igbinoba said he could not because, according to him, it was a crowd. "It happened that we met there by chance. I didn't know him before", he said.

The Nation's investigation, however, revealed that Mr Barnabas Onyejelem was the victim. It was learnt that Barnabas, a driver plying Benin/NIFOR route, was returning home when he ran into the checkpoint. He tried to rescue a driver colleague who was allegedly being brutalised by the police but reportedly fell victim.

The late Barnabas, fondly called 'Danfo' by his colleagues, hailed from Mbiase in Imo State, The Nation gathered.

By John Mayaki and Marshall Ikubaiyeje, Benin

It was also learnt that on the fateful day, Barnabas boarded a vehicle to Ugbowo Motor park where he usually left his bus at the end of the day's business as arranged by the bus owner.

After loading his bus, he set off for NIFOR. At Ikabeto junction at Iguovenwen village where about five mobile policemen mounted a road block as usual, he discovered that a driver colleague, Mr. Efosa Omorogieva, who had moved before him from the park, was being brutalised by the policemen.

In the spirit of comradeship, Barnabas rushed to the scene already crowded with sympathizers, to rescue his colleague from the policemen.

It was gathered at the Central Hospital from most of the people injured during the fracas who were receiving treatment, that it was because the officers' insistence on collecting N20 sparked off the crisis.

The Nation learnt that Omorogieva had spent money on buying fuel and as such, had no cash on him to offer the policemen after he was flagged down at the checkpoint. Following the insistence by the policemen, Omorogieva was said to have asked any of the passengers inside his bus to lend him N100.00 to pacify the officers.

It was in this bid that another commercial vehicle eluded the policemen and beat the check point 'trap'. The policemen suddenly flared up and descended on Omorogieva. He was hospitalised. He was on his sick bed when the news broke that his colleague had been shot dead by the police.

When contacted for reaction, the Edo State Police spokesman Mr. Peter Ogboi said investigation into the incident was on top gear.

On who pulled the trigger, Ogboi explained that "if all of us are carrying arms and a shot is released leading to the death of somebody, you will say we were not the one who released the shot."

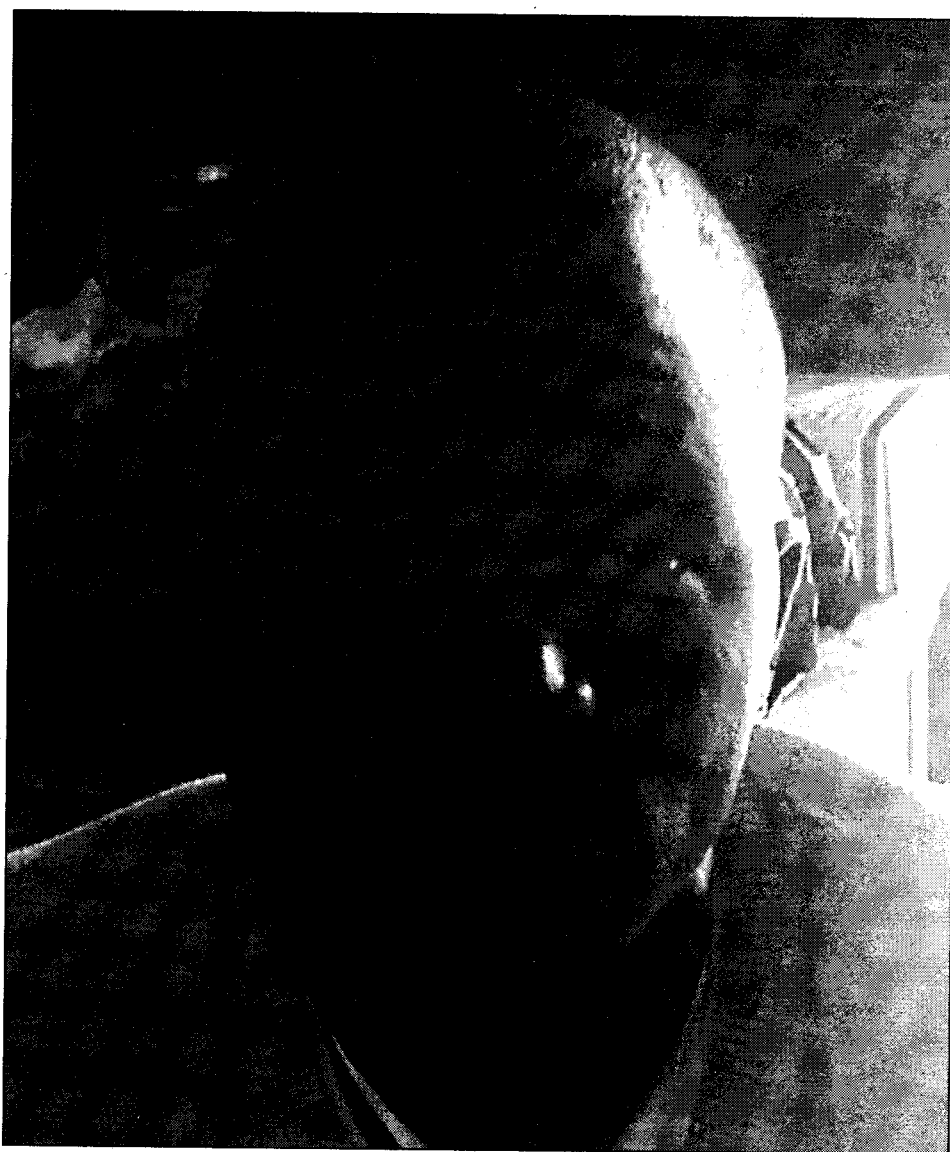
"All of us will continue to say we did not because it is possible that I have extra ammunition. So, when I fired, I replaced. Until you carry these guns to a ballisticsian who will now tell you this gun fired recently and that this one did not, we cannot say who fired the shot."

"This is why we say investigation is on, we need the ballisticsian who perhaps lives in Lagos or Kaduna to tell us who fired. So, the guns must be taken to him and so, we are still investigating."

As for the cause of the police brutality, Ogboi said there was no need giving details, adding that "there are situations and occasions where policemen are expected to use their firearms; the police is looking at those occasions whether they were present."

However, Ogboi said police top brass frown at a situation where firearms are used indiscriminately. He said the Command had given a stern warning to all personnel to ensure that firearms are not used except it becomes necessary.

"By the way, we are not equally



•Mr Igbinoba

'Before they got on the bike again, they pointed their guns towards where we were standing and pulled the trigger. They fired and it hit me in my hand. It was in the midst of the crowd.'



•Mr Ogboi

happy that people die as a result of using firearms in such circumstance that will put doubt on whether the occasion you are expected to use fire arms are there."

As to whether the policemen who fired the shot that killed has been arrested, Ogboi said: "Yes, all the team who went to that place for duty. But, we have not concluded investigation because it is entirely very wrong for you to conclude that ABCD shot, even when you have sought the opinion of an expert who has not given his opinion as to what happened."

"Of course you know it is a common thing, you find people say everytime there is problem between a policeman and a civilian, the next thing that will be concluded is N20.00."

"I think this is not the case. I don't want

to trade words with people. I just want to say that the issue of N20.00 should be dismissed in this case"

Meanwhile, at the Central Hospital, Igbinoba is not receiving proper treatment for his hand injury.

He alleged that he had been taking care of himself and would thank God if he is discharged from the hospital to properly take care of himself.

"They can't remove the bullet from my hand. The bullet is scattered inside. They said they want to do X-Ray to know what to do about it," he said.

On medical bills, the Police PRO said: "let's conclude our investigation before we talk about hospital bills," Igbinoba claimed to have spent over N50, 000 on treatment.