

Minister's aide's corpse sold to ritualists at National hospital

THE mystery surrounding the sudden disappearance of the remains of one Rowland Ekati, the personal secretary to the Minister of Science and Technology, Professor Turner Isoun, from the National Hospital, Abuja has taken a new dimension.

Yesterday, *The Nation* gathered that one of the attendants manning the hospital's morgue has confessed to releasing the lifeless body of Rowland to a cult group which he belonged to, for a hefty sum of N12 million.

Though the hospital authorities continue to deny this account, believing in the propriety of the staff, it still went ahead to charge two mortuary attendant along with the mortician to court.

The two attendants simply identified as Henry and Oscar and the health officer that embalmed the corpse were charged to Magistrate Court, Jabi on Wednesday by the police.

Ekati, a chief of Odi town in Bayelsa state, died in a motor accident on October 7 this year along the Mabushi roundabout in Abuja while going for the gala night of the 10th anniversary of the

creation of Bayelsa state.

He was driving in his car with his first wife and three children when the accident occurred in Abuja and reportedly died on the spot.

According to a source, his body was taken to the hospital by one of his children who signed on behalf of the family. On getting to the hospital that night, the source said the family offered the sum of N30, 000 to the mortuary attendants on duty for embalment. As it turned out, the money was not paid into the hospital treasury.

However, the following morning, the supervisor on duty noted that there was no entry of the corpse in the register leading him to ask the family to pay the stipulated N20,000 to the hospital before it could admit the body into the morgue.

The supervisor, whose name was given by the hospital spokesperson, Yahaya Ozi Sadiq, is an assistant director and was said to have faulted the procedure observed by the family and for registration of corpses in the morgue.

Upon payment of the stated money, an autopsy was then carried out on the body on October 31st followed by the issuance of a death certificate on November 1, 2006.

For many hospital staff, the incident will be one of the many wrong things

■ Kamarudeen OGUNDELE, ABUJA ■

morticians are known for.

Stories are told of terrible things done to dead bodies by morticians who are trained to handle remains of human beings.

But this situation however, attracted the attention of the public when some Bayelsa State citizens in Abuja wrote a letter dated November 15 to the management of the National Hospital requesting it to provide the corpse of late Rowland or face the wrath of its people living in Abuja.

The group followed it up with a public protest within the premises of the hospital on November 17. The protest was led by the President of the Bayelsa citizens forum, Ebinabio F. Kieriamia. They threatened to take legal action against the management of the hospital if the body of Rowland was not found and delivered to the family.

Some of the placards carried by the group read: "give us the body of our brother, what happened to Rowland's body? where is Rowlands body?"

The demonstration led to a public outcry against the hospital, prompting President Olusegin



Isoun

Obasanjo to query the hospital authorities to explain the whereabouts of the body.

Among the concerns raised were the procedure for accepting bodies left in the care of the healthcare agency, the many sharp practices in the hospital which is regarded as the main referral hospital in the federal capital territory.

The hospital was accused of selling the corpse to ritualists. Some even said it is a common practice at the hospital.

The hospital's Assistant Director of Information Service, Mallam Sadiq had a tough time explaining the hospital's position on the matter. He debunked the claims that the corpse was sold to ritualists by the hospital.

"It would be stupid for any staff of the hospital to think of selling a



• Prof. Eyitayo Lambo

corpse properly deposited at the hospital for whatsoever reasons while the wife was still admitted in the hospital", Sadiq said.

He admitted that though due process was not followed by the mortuary attendants on duty before releasing the corpse to whoever, the suspects are yet to confess the person that took delivery of the corpse.

Sadiq admitted that "The Death Certificate was not duly signed by the Doctor and was not cross examined by any of the family members that brought the corpse to the hospital".

He also confirmed that the attendants and the supervisor have been charged to court by the police based on its findings and the report of the hospital. He also said the suspects are

being remanded by the police in Abuja.

He noted that the case is due for hearing at the Magistrate court, Jabi on December 23 where the matter will be fully established at the law court.

Sadiq told *The Nation* that the hospital has done everything possible to make the suspects confess but such has yielded no result. He could not however establish the rationale behind the irregularities in the release of the corpse but promised that the hospital would do anything possible within the law to salvage its good name.

But independent investigation established that one of the detained men, identified by interrogators as the principal suspect, has confessed to receiving the sum of N12 million from a cult group for ritual burial.

The name of the cult group was not disclosed.

The Federal Capital Police Command, Public Relation Officer, Assistant Superintendent (ASP) Elijah Atinkinkpa could not confirm the report. He pleaded for more time to confirm the latest development on the case from the command criminal investigation department (CID) that is handling the case.