

Fear grips community over murder

NDIGBO in Ijebu - Igbo, Ogun state, are hurting over the death of their kinsman, Mr Emmanuel Unigwe, from Ogbu in Enugu State. Emmanuel was said to have been gruesomely murdered on July 11, 2007 by some suspected blood thirsty indigenes of Atikori, Ijebu - Igbo. And for the better part of last week, the entire Atikori community was enveloped by palpable fears and apprehension. The concern in the community was that there could be break down of law and order following speculations that the grieving Igbos would revenge the death of their brother.

Emmanuel, a commercial motorcycle operator, was abducted in his home at 33, Babalawo Street, Hospital road, Atikori, Ijebu - Igbo, by his killers around 2 a.m. and taken to an unknown destination and allegedly shot dead. Two weeks after, his remains is yet to be found. The gun shot that sent him to the great beyond, according to eyewitness, woke his neighbours who attempted to intervene but Emmanuel's assailants threatened them with similar fate if they wouldn't allow them to complete their assignment.

But last week, the matter got to a head when the Igbo in Ijebu North Local Government Council, Ogun state, took their pro-

■ Ernest NWOKOLO ■
Ijebu - Ode

test to the Palace of the Monarch and Keegbo of Atikori, Oba Ibitoye Solaja, over his seeming indifference to the Igbos' sense of insecurity in the last three weeks and the loss of their brother.

Led by their leader, Chief Chika Iloputaife, they urged the Oba to assure them of their safety in his domain as well as assist them to prevail on his subjects to produce the body of Emmanuel, for a befitting burial in the East. In a letter delivered to Oba Solaja in his palace and which was copied to other monarchs in Ijebu North Council and the Police, the Igbos stated:

"The intimidations and victimizations of the Ibos here by some indigenes have gotten to its climax. Ibo tenants are ill-treated by landlords and the cyclists among us are often the subjects of unjust attack and harassment. Our brother Emmanuel was abducted in his home at Oke - Ife in the night and murdered by some indigenes of Atikori. The whereabouts of his body remains unknown to us. We are worried about our safety.

"Your Highness, as you all know that the Ibos do take home for burial the corpse of their relative, so, we are now demanding that through your good office to assist us in producing the corpse of our brother, Emmanuel, so that we can take it home for burial."

The Nation learnt that the trouble that cost Emma his life started on July 10 when his wife, Mrs Mary Unigwe, got into a fight with one Mr Dare, a neighbour and in the process, Dare sustained injury on his head when he was allegedly hit with an object by Mary. This led to the arrest of Mary the following day and subsequent detention at Topo Divisional Police Headquarters, Ijebu - Igbo. It was gathered that all attempt by her husband, Emma, to bail her on the same day when he returned from his job in the evening failed as he was told by the Police to come the following day.

But by the night of July 11, while Mary was still in Police cell, his assailants came calling and sur-

rounded Emmanuel's compound, and with a big bang on his window, they ordered him to come out. In a bid to escape through the back door, *The Nation* gathered that he ran into the waiting hands of his attackers, who whisked him to some buildings away from his residence and allegedly shot him at point blank range. His body was said to have been taken to an unknown location while accusing fingers point at Dare as the mastermind of the killing.

Chief Iloputaife told *The Nation* that when they got wind of the missing man, the Ibos carried out an independent investigation and discovered that he had been murdered and we suspected that the killing was carried out by some indigenes of Atikori. "We are appalled by his manner of death. We have decided to remain calm and allow justice to take its course on the matter. We don't want a future

re-occurrence and we are appealing to the people of Atikori to produce the corpse of our relative for a befitting burial in his home town," he said.

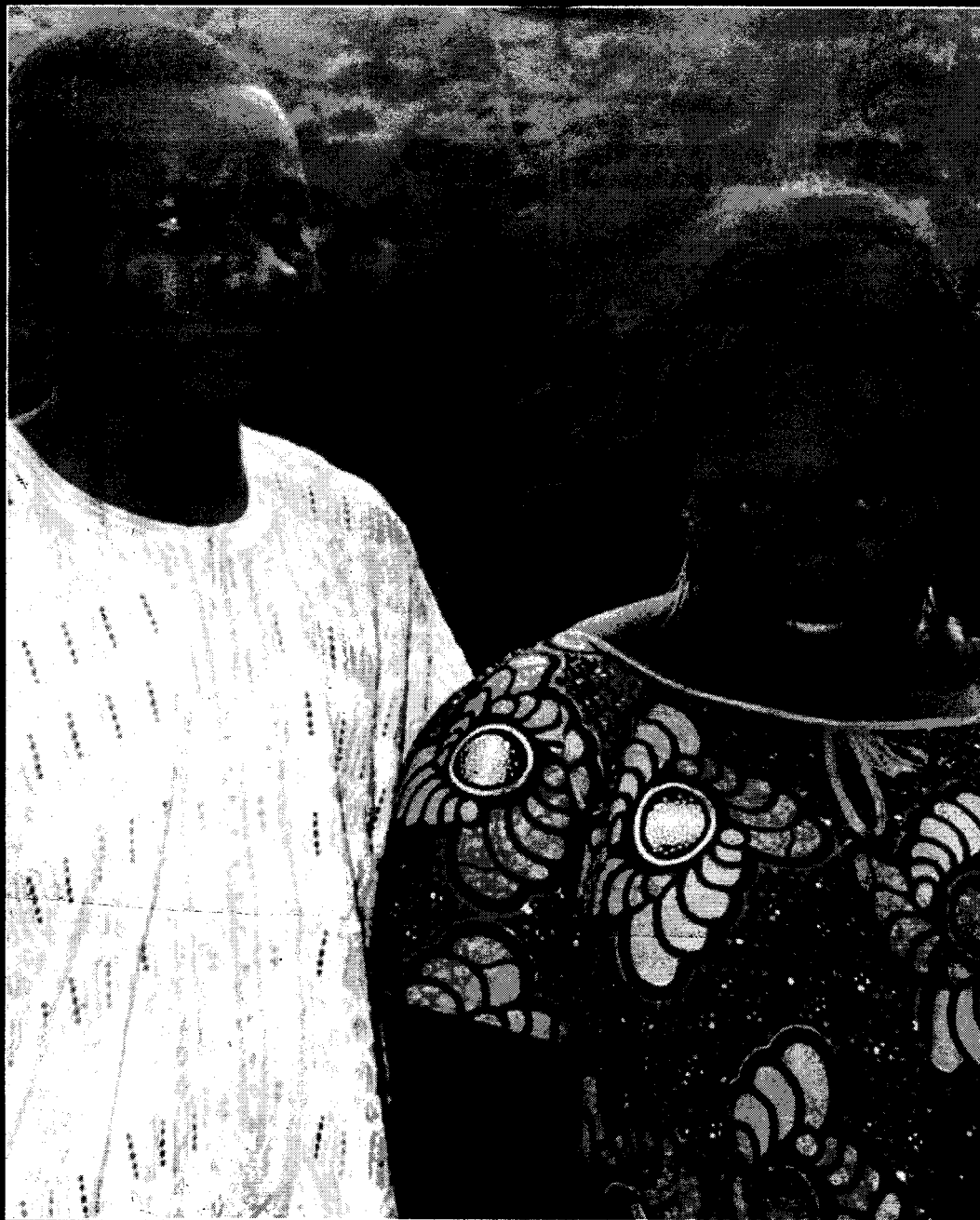
At Oke - Ife area of Atikori where the incident happened, the speculation is that Emmanuel's corpse was hauled into Osun River, about 10km from Ijebu - Igbo and the young men there have fled the area, leaving the children and the aged behind, following a man - hunt for the suspected killers. The Ogun State Police Public relations Boss, Mr Femi Awoyale, a Deputy Superintendent of Police, told *The Nation* that four persons have so far been arrested in connection with the crime. "Those arrested have volunteered useful information that is helping the Police in further investigation into the matter", he said.

Mary, from her hide - out, told our reporter that she was not aware that her husband had been killed until she was released from detention on July 12. She

denied hitting Dare on the head with an object.

"I thought my husband was missing and it was only on Wednesday, last week that it dawned on me that he is dead. I have not seen his corpse and it is being said that his body was thrown into the Osun River and a search had been conducted around the area but his body was not found. I have lost my pregnancy to the beating by Dare. I'm appealing to the government and relevant authority to prevail on the killers to produce his corpse," she said.

The Nation visited the Keegbo of Atikori, Oba Ibitoye Solaja, and met him in his Palace but the Oba vehemently declined to comment on the matter. "If you were here earlier you would have seen the crowd of Ibos that came to my palace. The Police were here also. I have spoken to them and I won't grant you any interview or comment on the matter. I won't say anything," he told *The Nation*.



• Late Emmanuel and wife, Mary



• The late Emmanuel