

# Youths protest over 46 death in 3 weeks

Recently, the youths in Owo community in Ondo State set coffins in showrooms ablaze, claiming that coffin makers are the cause of motor accidents that claimed about 46 lives within three weeks last month in the town. Our correspondent Taiwo Abiodun reports

**I**N the female surgical ward at the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Owo, Ondo State is Mrs Charity Ezurike on the bed in pains. Her right leg was in bandage. She is among the lucky two people that did not die out of 18 passengers in the accident that occurred on the 12th of March in Agbor, last month.

According to the woman, the front tyre pulled off while the Bus was on top speed and the *Sunshine Bus* somersaulted and only three of them survived. Most of the victims were Igbo traders; Robinson Okorie, Enyi Kponwa, Mrs Ugha, Victor Ikejamba, Mrs. Callista Ejemson and many others who went to Onitsha to buy goods.

Opposite Ezurike's bed is a beautiful lady, fair in complexion. She is among the three survivors in another auto crash at Eleyowo near Owo, the accident claimed 14 passengers.

According to eye witness account, the driver was overtaking a trailer at 8pm and had head-on collision with another trailer, a Guinness truck. Among those who died are a pastor, Zion Bayide who was on his way back home from Lagos after spending 41 days and 41 nights at Lagos Bar Beach. A Rufus Giwa Polytechnic Staff who was on level 13. She is Mariam Folusho Ogundare, who went to buy wedding materials for her daughter that was preparing for marriage, and others are: a block maker called Opmulero, Amasa Amudu, Monday Four-Four, and many others. The accident occurred on the 19th of March.

On the 5th of March, some

Hausa traders and some Owo indigenes who left for the North to buy foodstuff did not reach their destination as they all perished on the road.

In Owo last month it was wailings and gnashing of teeth, almost all the quarters are pasted with obituary posters. At the time of filling this report some victims were yet to be buried.

However, spontaneous reactions came from the youths who after their findings summoned courage and challenged the coffin makers whom they alleged to have been performing rituals cum diabolical means and practices of voodoo in an attempt to boost their sales. The youths accused coffin makers as the cause of the calamity and went on rampage to set already made coffins ablaze in shops and showrooms.

Speaking with *The Nation* a man who begged for anonymity said the coffin makers were caught red handed performing rituals at night by a hunter. "They caught them with a small coffin where they put strange things and sprinkled corns and mysterious water at the four entrances to the town. At another time they were in rode in a motorcade into the town with their ambulances blowing their siren as if they were doing funeral. In fact we caught them red handed and they cannot deny that"

Another grievance of the youth is the artistic way of making the coffins. "They design coffins like an Aeroplane, Mercedes Benz car, boat and even ship, they even put sirens in the coffins as if it is their joy to do that. "They give you outrageous prices of coffins even baby coffins."

A notable politician Mr. Adebeye Olanipekun said in the olden days coffins were not constructed until there is a dead body, but now it is a different case. You don't display coffins publicly. And the way people are dying is painful. I lost people in all these accidents. But God knows better."

But in defence Ofada Okusolawo said nothing of such is happening. "We do not observe rituals. Personally for me I never prayed for anybody to die; asked why he went into coffin making, Okusolawo said he was once making only furniture until his former boss, Ilesanmi advised him to be making coffin. He however said the public had wrong impression about them. "We started Association of Ambulance, there was a meeting at Ipele and the members rode in a motorcade with their ambulance to and from the meeting but were later misunderstood by the public. I don't even have an ambulance, I have *Okada*. But the youth came to burn the coffins I have already made. I lost up to N320,000.00 worth of coffins. I have 18 coffins already made in my workshop". Asked whether it is normal to have an already made coffin before announcing one's death in reported but the man spoke in defence and said "we petty carpenters and cabinet makers have our own displayed in our shops. But painfully, I have lost all my coffins and working tools to these youths who came to burn them. I am in debt for I got N100,000 thrift from Olayinka Ifesowapo Corporative Society and I also borrowed N70,000 to



• Chief Oshere



• Elizabeth



• A coffin maker in his shop

PHOTOS: TAIWO ABIODUN

make all these. But we have sworn an oath at the Olowo palace that we never did such a thing.

For Abatimo Otonola (45) he lost N150,000 worth of coffins burnt by the irate mob. He debunked the allegation that coffins were only made when one dies in the olden days. His words, "I remember when Chief Aruwajoye, a sawmill and furniture maker was alive. He used to make coffins for the rich and displayed them in his showroom, so it is not a new thing. In fact the whole problem started when they formed the Association of

Ambulance owners and they were in a convoy from Ipele to Owo, which was later misinterpreted to be fetish. I am not fetish. We all swore to an oath the palace".

High chief Oshere who spoke on behalf of Olowo of Owo said the youths reacted because it occurred every week and they thought it was the handiwork of the coffin makers. Asked whether he believed that coffin makers could be responsible, he replied "We are all from Yoruba land and we have different customs. An average Yoruba man believes that if there is chains of bad events then they should do something about it. They don't display coffins in the olden days. When somebody dies the following day they prepare his coffin and he will be buried."

He however berated the influx of coffin making business and said "they pretend to be cabinet makers but suddenly they jumped into coffin (making) because they make more money. So when they display about 10-20 coffins in their shop, we believe that every morning they will pray that they will like to sell their products and they will so everything possible to make sure that people die that is the belief".

On the rumour making the rounds that the coffin makers do rituals to boost their sales, the Chief said "we heard that. That is what annoyed the boys because they said there was a time they went to Ipele, a village and they came back in procession and do all kinds of things".

However, Chief Oshere said they have banned all cabinet makers from making coffins "we have told them to stop making

coffins and they have promised to abide by it."

While Mrs. Elizabeth Ola one of the luckily survivors in the accident is thanking God for saving her she said "I saw dead bodies. I was in a coma for four days. I saw hell but I thank God for keeping me alive. Am I a saint? Am I better than those who died in the auto crash? In fact about 14 people died on the spot, two were taken to the hospital and they forgot one leg in the vehicle and they took the leg to him in the hospital but the man eventually gave up the ghost. I will in July celebrate it along with my 50th birthday and I will do a thanksgiving in the Church.

Mr. Beye Olanipekun a notable politician said what the town need is prayer. "We should pray to God to stop all these. May the departed soul rest in peace.

But for the husband of Charity Ezurike, Paul Ezurike, is bitter and sad on what his wife told him. His words, "my wife said the police who came to rescue them at the scene of the accident said they removed their money and stole their goods, she said police used their gun butts to hit some of the victims who needed help and were killed.

When *The Nation* met Mrs. Ezurike on her hospital bed, she was in pains. Asked to tell her story, she looked at this reporter, shook her head and said "the Federal Road Safety Corps really tried but the police came and hit me. They dragged the purse I tied round my waist as I was dragging it along with them they started hitting me with their gun butts. I then pretended I was dead and they removed over N150,000. The police are terrible. Go and meet Madam Ayileka who could tell more," she said shaking her head.

## Pension office give out N1 billion for policemen

By Jude Isiguzo and Mohammed Basir, Lokoja

A retiree in Kwara, who spoke to *The Nation* on condition of anonymity expressed disappointment that his name was not on the payment list.

Some others in Kogi nearly caused commotion when they were told that they would have to go to Abuja before they could be paid.

One of them, Alfa Patrick, said that he was just informed that he would have to travel to Abuja to get his pension arrears, adding that he was not happy.

However, pension payment officers in the two states assured those with grievances that their cases would be settled in matter of days.

The leader of the team in Kwara, Mrs. Ubandoma R. Bwen said that another payment would commence immediately as the office had adopted the policy of

continuous payment until the funds are exhausted.

Bwen, lamented that despite the large turnout of the pensioners, many of those that their name came out for April payment did not show up.

She also said that some of those whose names were not on the list were to be paid by the Pension Commission (PENCOM). "Their pension is not to be paid by the police pension for now. PENCOM will come to verify how it owes them. But we don't know if the commission will hand over the payment to the police.

In Kogi the leader of the payment team, Fransisca Oguntayo also said that some of those who were not paid would be receiving their pension from PENCOM.

"Some of them were already paid by PENCOM and I am sure PENCOM is ready to pay them their arrears. There in no way we

can pay them their arrears when we their earlier transaction was not in the state.

She said that large numbers of the pensioners had been paid, while more were still coming to get their money.

Mr. Samuel Moses, son to one late Moses Okolo, caused a mild drama as his father's name was not enlisted among the deceased pensioners.

But he was told that the pension office was not aware that Okolo was dead. He was advised to send the relevant documents to the office, even as Samuel claimed to have informed the Pension body of his father's demise.

The new Director of Pension, Esai Dangabar, however said that the office was computerizing its operation and also meeting with PENCOM, "once all these are done, all the complaints will vanish. But before then we will still continue to pay on regular basis," he said, adding that over N1 billion was paid out in the current exercise.



• Okiro

As many Police Pensioners all over the country smile home with their bumper pension benefits, pensioners in Kogi and Kwara States were not left out.

But the police offices in the two states got more that they bargained for when the numbers of the pensioners that appeared in the offices were more than the cheques to be given out.