

UNIUYO protest: Six students die

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Six students died **yesterday** over the violent protest at the University of Uyo (UNIUYO).

Among the dead is Kingsley, a 200-level geology student and Donald Onukaogu, the Senate President of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS).

There is controversy over how Kingsley died, but the NANS senate president and four others died in a road crash in Abia State. They were on their way to Uyo to mediate in the crisis.

UNIUYO students accused security operatives of killing Kingsley, popularly known as 'KC', during the protest over the alleged exploitative tendencies of Vice Chancellor Prof. Comfort Ekpo.

A member of the Students' Union Government, who pleaded not to be named said a security agent shot Kingsley dead.

He said Kingsley's killing angered the rest of the students who set ablaze the Vice Chancellor's Office, Deputy Vice Chancellor's Office (Academic) and Records Office.

A visit to the city campus of the university showed that 12 vehicles, some of them owned by the university, were destroyed during the protest.

The students also destroyed equipment in the Exams and Records Unit, Finance and Accounts, Internal Audit and Cash Office.

The Computer Maintenance Department was also not spared, as hard discs and other facilities were removed by the students.

The peaceful protest over hike in transport fares, which started early on Wednesday, degenerated, resulting in the destruction of property.

Speaking to NAN, the Chairman of the UNIUYO branch of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Mr Anyim Nwachukwu, said that he was not aware of what exactly led to the protest.

Nwachukwu said that when the crisis started, he and some lecturers "managed to escape from campus".

"We were only throwing pebbles, water in sachets and bottles after it because obvious that the police only arrived at the scene to kill us. They (the police) were shooting sporadically and firing tear-gas canisters at us.

"They (the police) fired tear-gas canisters into the female hostels. Many of our female students got injured. Their bullet killed Kingsley", the SUG official said.

But the police said they could not explain what killed Kingsley because his body was brought from inside the campus to the road where the police stood by the students during the protest.

Police spokesman Etim Dickson said only one person died during the protest.

Dickson said 45 rioters comprising of UNIUYO students and others from Bida Polytechnic and Madonna university were arrested during the protest.

"It has been established that one student died during yesterday's protest by University of Uyo students. A 200 level Geology student died. We were able to get this from the students who brought the body from inside the campus to the road.

"You know we cannot enter the campus, we have to be outside. It was the protesting students who brought the body to us on the road and it was collected from them.

"The mother of the deceased has come to us. She made a statement. I want to say one 200 level student died. The cause of the death we don't know yet.

"Also, about 45 other students coming from different universities were arrested. Some of the students arrested during the protest came from Bida Polytechnic and we also have some from Madonna University.

"What killed the boy from inside the school we don't know? They only dropped the body on the road because they said they wanted to carry the body to government house and we told them no, it is not their duty and we collected the body from them.

On the students' claim that a trigger-happy policeman shot their colleague, Etim said: "Let the students find out who shot the boy and at what point? They will claim but investigation will prove. Even there is a big charm tied to the left wrist of the body. I don't know whether it is a modern wristwatch."

UNIUYO students staged a peaceful protest on Wednesday following the introduction of N2,000 GST fee and N200 transport fee for science students from their campus on Ikpa Road to the permanent site in Nsukara Offot by the university management.

The students accused the vice-chancellor of incompetence in managing the affairs of the institution. They demanded her sack.

The accident, which led to the death of the NANS senate president and four others, occurred at Ariam in Ikwuano Local Government Area of Abia State. It was along the Umuahia-Ikot Ekpene federal highway. Seven other students sustained injuries.

The accident involved a Hiace bus in which the students were travelling and an articulated vehicle (trailer) that was coming from Akwa Ibom, which lost control before ramming into the students' bus.

The NANS president was a Master's student of Computer Science/ ICT at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), Imo State.

The other students who died in the crash are: Abdulazeez Kabir Oladimeji (University of Ibadan), Jerry Sorkaa (Benue State University), Japhet Duru (Federal Polytechnic, Nekede) and Asa Ejiate (Delta State University). The deceased were travelling to Uyo for mediate in the UNIUYO riot, which claimed life of a student on Wednesday.

The bodies were deposited at the Federal Medical Centre, Umuahia mortuary. The injured are receiving treatment at the hospital. One of the students was treated and discharged. He left for Owerri.

There was tension within the medical centre as students of tertiary institutions within Umuahia and its environs stormed the place.

Abia State Governor Theodore Orji visited the hospital immediately he learnt about the incident, which described as a calamity. He said it was disheartening for future leaders to die through accident.

The coordinator, Zone B of NANS, Chinonso Obasi thanked the governor for sympathising with them.

National Association of Nigerian Students, Joint Campuses Committee (NANS JCC) Chairman, Comrade Fortune Ifeka expressed shock over the death of Onukaogu.

In a statement in Nnewi on behalf of the students of Anambra State, Ifeka said if their deaths were caused by the police as alleged, the policemen should be fished out and made to bear the consequences of their action.

He added that it is regrettable that over 15 students had been killed in the last two months in manners that could have been avoided if the strikes and closure of schools were not on.

A few hours after the death of the Senate President of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Donald Onukaogu, and four other students, who were travelling to Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital to mediate in the riot that engulf the University of Uyo (UNIUYO) on Wednesday, the NANS president, Comrade Yinka Gbadebo, and some officials of the students' body were attacked yesterday in Ibadan by Operation Burst task force.

Operation Burst is the Oyo State joint security outfit.

Gbadebo was said to be leading a pack of protesters, mainly students of higher institutions in Oyo State. The protesters barricaded the road leading the University College Hospital (UCH), demanding that all campuses be shut down to mourn the death of the NANS officials, who died in an accident yesterday along Umuahia-Ikot Ekpene highway.

The Nation learnt that operatives of the task force visited the scene to disperse the protesters, who prevented the motorists from having easy movement along the road. Gbadebo was said to have directed the students not to leave the road, urging them to stay back. This led to his arrest by the task force men.

The task force later released Gbadebo on the spot and he was taken to a hospital in Ibadan, for treatment.

Gbadebo, who was responding to treatment declined to comment on his whereabouts.

Wolimoh said: "We were holding a protest in Ibadan when Operation Burst came to attack us. The NANS president was manhandled by the policemen, who injured him on the head and right eye. Five other students were also injured but I will not tell you the hospital where they are receiving treatment."