

Death of 27-yr-old commercial motorcycle rider sparks protests in Ogun community

CHAOS took the place of peace in Ihunbo, a community in Ipokia Local Government Area, Ogun State, recently, following the killing of a commercial motorcycle operator, Obasanjo Idowu Gbadamosi, allegedly by some officials of the Nigerian Customs Service.

Angry residents went on the rampage, hauling missiles at both the customs men and the police who were drafted to the scene to restore the peace.

It took the intervention of soldiers from the nearby 139 Battalion Brigade, Owode, to disperse the protesters and contain the brewing violence.

According to eyewitness accounts, the late Gbadamosi was conveying two bags of rice on his motorcycle for some traders when he was flagged down by customs men at a checkpoint in Ihunbo, and demanded for "kola." He was said to have explained to them that he had earlier 'settled' them but they would not take any of that.

An eyewitness, Muritala Adele, said: "It is the usual practice for customs men to demand 'kola' from commercial motorcycle operators when they are conveying goods for traders on Idiroko Road. The deceased was a colleague and he was on his fifth trip for the day when he was shot by the customs men after he reminded them that he had earlier 'settled' them. They opened fire on him twice and he fell in a pool of blood.

"Youths of the community later staged a protest, setting bonfire and barricading the road. Attempts by the police to disperse the protesters were met with stiff resistance as the enraged youths pelted the minions of law with stones."

A source, who asked not to be named, explained that the deceased was allegedly attacked by the customs men because he refused to stop when he was flagged down, and he refused because he felt the officers should know that he had 'settled'.

The source said: "He had earlier 'dropped something' and so was shocked when they again stopped him to demand 'settlement'. Hence, he sped off when they flagged him down. This was what got the officers annoyed and they fired some shots to scare him. Disappointed that the shots did not deter him, the officers threw sticks at his motorbike, and in an attempt to escape, he ran into a truck that crushed him to death."

Recalling the incident, elder brother of the deceased, Tajudeen Gbadamosi, said: "The incident happened on Tuesday August 20, 2013, at about 5 pm. My brother was conveying two bags of rice for one his customers on his motorbike. When he got to Ita-Egbe in Ihunbo, some customs men at a checkpoint stopped him.

"He believed that he had 'settled' them earlier and that they should not have stopped him again. He tried to explain that to them. He had barely left the scene when they threw heavy sticks at him and fired two shots. It was while he was trying to evade the bullets that he ran into an oncoming truck that crushed him to death."

The mother of the deceased, Madam Medese Gbadamosi, was surrounded by sympathisers when our correspondent visited their family house. She could not immediately grant our correspondent an audience as she stared into space, seemingly oblivious of the goings on around her.

A few minutes later, she managed to contain her emotion, saying: "What else can I do? They have killed my son and left my heart to ache. I have left everything to God because He is the ultimate judge of man and He will judge his killers."

The deceased 27-year-old was said to be a graduate of Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education (AOOED),



● His mother



● The late Gbadamosi

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■ Kunle AKINRINADE ■

Lagos State, where he also met his wife, Chidinma. The marriage produced two children but he relocated to Ihunbo because of his inability to secure better employment in Lagos. After an endless search for job, he decided to work as a commercial motorcycle operator, which he did until his tragic death.

Speaking further, Tajudeen, said: "After he finished from AOOED, he went further to train as a computer engineer and much later as a telecom technician. But he relocated to our home town when things were no longer okay for him.

"Traders usually patronise okada riders in this community to transport goods for them. It is unfortunate that he was mistaken for a smuggler by the customs men that chased him to death. Despite their complicity in his death, they even refused to release his body until I insisted on having his corpse for burial according to Islamic rites. Hence, his remains were buried the following day.

"We had wanted to take the matter up with the Customs authorities, but the family later changed their mind. ...Just two months ago, they killed one of our sisters called Fausat. She was on her way to a nearby

The customs men did not shoot the motorcyclist. It was just an accident involving a smuggler, who ran into a trailer while trying to avoid customs officers on patrol at Ihunbo, Ipokia Local Government — Police

market when the car she was travelling in ran into a checkpoint manned by some customs men."

When our correspondent sought the response of the spokesman of Ogun Customs Command, Mr. Chike Ngige, on the telephone, he said he was not aware of the incident and asked for some time to consult the Idiroko Command. He, however, called back a few hours later and said the officers involved were not of the Ogun Command.

He said: "I have confirmed the incident, but our men are not involved. Although we have a checkpoint close to the scene of the incident, the officers involved are from the Controller General's Squad on complementary monitoring and patrol."

Confirming the incident in a telephone conversation with our correspondent, the Public Relations Officer of the Ogun State Police Command, Mr. Olumuyiwa Adejobi, however, said: "The customs men did not shoot the motorcyclist. It was just an accident involving a smuggler, who ran into a trailer while trying to avoid customs officers on patrol at Ihunbo, Ipokia Local Government."

"It is true that the incident sparked protests by residents, but our men responded promptly and brought the situation under control."