

## Benin chief, in-laws on war path over wife's murder

On the evening of December 10, last year, Chief Lucky Osawaru had a meal with his wife, Bridget, before she left for her pharmacy shop. It was at her business place that suspected kidnappers struck and took her away. A ransom of N1.5m was paid to secure her release on December 18 but it was her corpse that was given to the family on December 21. She was found dead at Okhuahie Bridge along the Benin-Agbor express road. The death of Bridget in the hands of her abductors is generating friction between her family and her husband.

The family is accusing the husband and his sister, Adesuwa of masterminding the kidnapping and subsequent killing of their sister. After the killing of Bridget, her husband was arrested and detained for 15 days. The release of the husband sparked a protest march by the family who accused the police of doing a shoddy investigation. Late Bridget was married to her husband, a chartered accountant, for 25 years. They had three daughters and the eldest is 18. Six years ago, the husband informed the wife that another woman had twins (boys) for him outside wedlock. This, the family said, did not go down well with their late daughter who insisted on paternity test on the children since the husband allegedly has low sperm count from series of medical investigations. Mother of the deceased, Helen, who joined in the protest called for a thorough investigation into the killing of her daughter. She said Osawaru had not visited the family to inform them of what happened to their daughter. In a petition addressed to the AIG Zone 5 and signed by F.E.Oberabor, the family called on the AIG to take over investigation of the matter with a view to ascertaining the real cause of her death.

According to the petition, "their daughter wanted to have more children for the husband but was unable to because the husband was confirmed to have low sperm count by different hospitals. Their daughter informed them that based on that, she was surprised when the husband informed her that a woman had given birth to twins for him. "That their daughter insisted that a DNA test must be conducted to verify the paternity of the twins before her husband would accept them and based on that, the husband became angry and invited both the wife's family and his family members for intervention. And when all these were happening, the woman had misunderstanding with the husband's younger sister Adesuwa threatened her that she would not live to see 2014." They said after the quarrel, their daughter was allegedly kidnapped from her chemist on Ekae at Sapele Road, Benin City, and subsequently found dead at Okhuahie Bridge, adding that her husband informed them that he had concluded negotiations with the alleged kidnappers and had given N1.5million to his younger brother who is a doctor to pay the kidnappers, but instead of their daughter, they received her corpse, eight days after her abduction. The family appealed to the IGP to take over the matter for a proper investigation of the matter and order the arrest of their in-law.

"The Police at the state Police Command did not do any investigation despite the overwhelming evidence against the suspects, hence this appeal for the transfer of the case", they concluded. Reacting, the bereaved husband said he had no reason to kill the woman he had loved all his life, adding that if they had quarrel, they would not have eaten together on the day the kidnappers struck. Chief Osawaru also denied bribing the police to stall investigation, stressing that he was arrested based on a petition the family wrote and he was detained for several days.

"I went to lay a formal complaint with the State Police Command Headquarters that my wife was kidnapped. It was incidented at the Kidnapping Section. The negotiation and payment of ransom was made on the 18th of December.

"As normal kidnapping happens, we thought that she will be released the next day. They did not release her,

and I took the call history to the station. I don't have any reason to kidnap my wife. We have lived together for several years. We have never had cause to quarrel. Which is better, to quit the marriage or to arrange to kill my own wife who have children for me. I can never do that. More so, we have been together in love. If we had quarrel, I won't eat her food."

On the allegation of low sperm count and having children outside wedlock, he said, "That is not correct. I have a wife outside, and it's a six-year marriage and the woman has a twins for me. The issue of medical and low sperm count is for doctors to explain. One can still father children with low sperm count. I don't want to lay blame on anybody, since I understand why they are acting that way. I am so confident that in the soonest possible time, the security agencies will come up with the truth. I am aware that they are working seriously."

"If I have a relationship with the security agencies, they won't detain me. I wrote my own statement, we attended interview with the Deputy Commissioner of Police, and right there, they knew the truth. But that does not mean that they have stopped working. I don't want to pre-empt them. They have all the histories to unravel all these. It's only a matter of time, I am so confident." Asked whether he spoke with his wife before ransom payment, Chief Osawaru said the negotiation was done by his younger brother and a brother to the wife.

"What happened was that when she was with them, based on friend's advice, my younger brother who is a medical doctor, and her younger brother who is an accountant communicated with the kidnappers. I didn't talk to them. All communications were done with the phone on loudspeakers," he added. Osawaru said before the ransom payment, he insisted that he spoke with my wife, adding, "but they told me that they spoke with her. It was that that gave me the confident to pay it. Why I panicked when they took her was because of her health condition. Actually, she was highly diabetic. If my wife does not take her insulin every day, she will collapse. She takes her insulin in the morning, and also in the evening. So I became worried, and I even asked people, will they give her drugs? That was my fear. I don't know what happened. It's only the autopsy, and the security agency's report that will tell us the truth. I don't know whether she was shot, strangled or died out of natural means."

"God will vindicate us in the end. First time, I sent my relatives, but they were chased away. Then the police incident happened. I sent them again but they were not received and I then went to the paternal side who received them, and said they will make arrangement and get back to us, only for us to hear that they have taken a different dimension of protests. We were already working on how to work together to unravel this," Chief Osawaru added.