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Pain, anger in Calabar as 21-yr-old boy dies in police custody • PPRO: it was a case of ill-health

FOR the family of Mr Stanley Etim, a 21-year-old boy who until recently was working at a very popular supermarket in Calabar, the Cross River State capital, Sparkz Shop, these are grieving times.

The family is accusing the police in the state of allegedly brutalising him to death and refusing to let them even see his body.

It was gathered that on Thursday, 5th of February 2015, two policemen from the D 5 unit of the Cross River State Police headquarters, Diamond Hill, allegedly barged into the shop, located opposite the University of Calabar mini gate along Etta Agbo Road.

The policemen simply identified by their first names, Uche and Peter, it was gathered, went to the shop to arrest Stanley, an attendant at the shop who the previous day reportedly had a misunderstanding with his friend, a girl called Chidinma at the Flour Mills Junction in Calabar.

Eyewitnesses said the policemen claimed they were arresting him for armed robbery.

But the family of the boy alleged that the misunderstanding led to a fight between him and the girl, after which the girl allegedly got in touch with another of her friend Uche, who was a policeman to deal with Stanley.

The President of Sparkz Shop, Mr Stephen Peters, with whom Stanley lived until his demise tearfully narrated to *The Nation*: "I called you because of what has happened between us and the police and in our helpless state, we had no option than to present the matter to the world through you what we are facing."

"On Thursday at about 3.30 pm, some policemen came here and informed me that one of my boys is involved in a robbery case. Obviously I know my employees here and none of them can do that kind of thing. They went ahead and arrested him. Two minutes after, I saw them driving one of my boys who happens to be living with me in my house, and who has never slept out since he started living with me over three years ago. They manhandled the boy the way they manhandle criminals. But the boy does not have the strength to take that kind of beating, as he was not a criminal. They beat the boy terribly. They lifted him and threw in the air and he fell to the ground. I had somewhere to go but when I saw that, I had to follow them."

"The way manhandled him right from here got me startled, so I had to drive behind them to the police station, as they threw him into their Hilux Van. We arrived sometime after them and while I was greeting some people, I saw the head of the D5 at the state CID who came out with the boy handcuffed and this time, he was badly brutalised. I could not recognise his face."

"As the man was coming, he was saying the boy had confessed to the crime, so before I could ask anything, they said they were taking him to go and bring other gang members. I went there with the store manager and another policeman came out and as soon as he sighted the store manager, Ito, he said he was the one who obstructed them while trying to arrest Stanley and they immediately arrested him."

"Immediately, they collected his shirt and he was squeezed inside the cell. They took Stanley to Etim Edem Motor Park, where we normally receive some of our stock, according to them, to identify other gang members. Again they brutally dealt with him at the motor park and then brought him back."

"Since they said it was a robbery case, we could not bail him that day. So the next morning, being Friday, I went there. Before then, I had asked the store manager to go and arrange food for him, but he said the policemen said they had taken him to a chemist for treatment. At about 11am, I went there and I saw the head of the D5 and followed him to his office and told him I was there for the boy. He told me that at night, the boy developed complications and was taken to the hospital. I asked which hospital but he did not give me any definite answer. I said I had to see the boy. I followed him downstairs and suddenly, he disappeared and I didn't see him again."

"So I went the General Hospital and Teaching Hospital, but did not see the boy there. So someone suggested we should check the police clinic. And then I when I went there and asked if the patient was there, the nurse asked me the name and when I mentioned the name, they brought out a folder and then informed me that that doctor said when people came for this particular patient they should inform her. At that point, I wanted to meet the doctor but was told she

■ Nicholas KALU, Calabar ■

was having a little meeting inside and then after then, I pressurised, the doctor came out and I asked them I was looking for men, she said the boy had been certified dead.

"I was really devastated at that point. I was so devastated because I never thought and never believed that a healthy young man who had left my house to the shop that morning died in that way. When we came out and were crying, there was a van parked there and the dead boy was in there in the van. So when they saw us crying, they immediately drove the boy away. I don't know where they went. The truth of the matter is that, up till now, we have not been given access to the body of the boy."

"After that I immediately called the lawyer and said this is what had happened and he told me to go to the commissioner. So we went to the police station. As soon as we drove

inside, when they saw it was us, they drove the corpse out again. We saw the commissioner and he asked what happened. I related this story to him. As I was relating, he said I should stop and then asked one of the policemen to go and call the assistant commissioner. When I wanted to continue, he said he was told that morning that an armed robber was shot at a crime scene at Flour Mill. We waited for the ACP and when he came, the commissioner asked me to repeat the story before the ACP, which I did and the ACP was also sad to hear that."

"The commissioner asked him to set up a panel immediately and they should report to him at 7 o'clock. At seven, we went and they told us the report was not conclusive because some policemen involved could not be reached and so we should come back the next day. The next day, we went, they told us that one of the policemen had written the report and that a certain girl was involved and he had to see the girl physically. So we came back the next day."

"They said they wanted to take a statement from the store manager so they can give an official report. The store manager wanted to write his statement, but we were terribly shocked when he wanted to write and the chairman of a panel set up by the assistant commissioner told the store manager that for this matter, they had to write the statement and read it for him and then he would sign."

"At that point, we really felt something was wrong and they were out to cover up something. At that time, we started talking to news people. Up till now, we have not seen the corpse."

The Store Manager, Mr Ito Okon, who said he was working with the late Stanley when the policemen arrived, narrated: "I was with the boy in the shop and then just stepped out and when I came back, I saw two guys on each side of the boy dragging him. I asked them what the problem was and that they should leave the guy. Other people around asked the same thing. And one of them said they were policemen. They brought out their handcuffs and cuffed him. They beat him up mercilessly. They threw him in the air and allowed him to crash to the floor."

"When they got to the Hilux, the one known as Uche said if I really wanted to know who they are that I should enter the Hilux with them, but I did not. So we followed them to the station and they told their OC that I was the one that stopped their arrest."

A petition by the twin brother of the deceased, Kingsley, through his legal paractioners, Bassey, Opar and Co, addressed to the DIC, Investigation Force, CID Complex Abuja, accused the men and officers of the Nigeria Police Force attached to D5, SCID, Calabar, Cross River State, of the gruesome killing of Mr Stanley Etim.

The petition sought the ordering of an independent and unbiased investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Stanley Etim with a view to prosecuting same.

The Police Public Relations Officer in the state, Mr Hogan Bassey, reacting to the development, however said: "There was a case of robbery reported by one ChiChi and the police investigated the case. In the course of investigating it, that Stanley was implicated and identified as one of those who took part in the robbery and was arrested."

"He made useful statements to us and was detained. In the course of the detention, he complained of ill-health and he was taken to the police clinic. It became serious and he was taken to the Teaching Hospital where he gave up the ghost."



• Stanley