



Anger over three friends' murder in Delta

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Last Tuesday, March 1, three friends, Odafe Kevwe Iwhiwhi (29), Kennedy Ogodo (33) and Otamedaye Onojighofia (26), left their homes in Ughelli, headquarters of Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta in search of fun. They went to a usual place on Ekrejebo Road, where they usually played games.

Few hours later, the remains of the trio were paraded by the police as criminal suspects killed during a 'fierce gun battle with criminals'.

A senior police officer at the A Division, Ughelli, said they were killed when policemen from the station responded to a distress call. He affirmed that they got three of the boys during exchange of fire.

They were buried on the evening of the incident. But if the police thought the matter was buried, they were mistaken as family members and friends of the boys raised the alarm over the incident.

Some of their siblings and friends who witnessed the incident told Niger Delta Report, that the police's allegation is incredulous, stressing that they were being economical with the truth.

It was gathered that 29-year-old Iwhiwhi was preparing for the ongoing Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination and would have written the examination three days after he was killed. His centre, our reporter gathered, was at the Michael and Cecilia Ibru University, Agbarha-Otor. His examination number was given as C12113158.

His uncle, Hon. Victor Okpowho, said: "He was supposed to have sat for JAMB last Saturday before he was killed. When I heard they were killed, I rushed to the police station on that Tuesday evening, at about 8pm. I was told they were killed in broad day light and I saw their dead bodies on the ground at the police station.

"I asked the police what happened and he said they were armed robbers. I told him no, there is nothing like that. On Wednesday, I went to the street where the incident happened at Ekredjebo road to find out. I was told that they were playing cards with their friends. There were no stories of robbery or breaking and entry in the area.

"I even took my time to start making inquiry if anybody had raised alarm or reported that he or she was robbed but there was no such incident; the picture of the house they were playing the cards and the shoes which one of them was wearing before they were killed was still there and the pictures are with me," Okpowho added,

One of the friends with whom the deceased were playing the game of card, who also witnessed the incident, told our reporter on condition of anonymity that they were neither fighting nor engaging anybody in a physical combat when the police stormed the scene and fatally shot the trio.

"We were playing cards when the vigilante group came and started chasing them. The police came and killed three of them with allegations of robbery."

Chief Michael Ogodo, Kennedy's father, lamented the tag of criminal being placed on the neck of his son and his 'murdered' friends.

"It is very unfortunate thing for the police to have pronounced that my son is an armed robber. There is nothing like that. My son is 33 years old and from birth till when he was killed he had never stolen from anybody. Complaint never came to me from anybody about him.

"I was not around when the incident happened, it was about 6pm that I was told that my son was killed

on allegations of robbery. If my son could be murdered in such a manner and putting on him allegation that he is a robber, then the police or the vigilante should equally tell me who he robbed or who had complained to the police that had led the killing of three innocent children.”

Reports that could not be independently verified indicated that the Ughelli Police Division was making spirited effort to settle the matter amicably. It was gathered that the remains of the trio has already been exhumed and deposited in a morgue.

“As I am speaking with you, there was an effort by the police authority to meet with the Ovie of Ughelli. But I don’t think the king was in the mood to see them because of the killing of his subjects. They were told that the monarch was not available,” a source privy to the matter added.

Meanwhile, the aggrieved grieving family has petitioned the AIG in charge of Zone 5, Benin City, the Senator representing Delta Central and other lawmakers, as they begin a quest for justice for the deceased.

The petition was authored by the law firm of Roland A. Ekpe & Co Chambers, which said the trio were brutally murdered in cold blood by the police and vigilance group.

It reads: “At about 12noon on the 1st day of March, 2016, Messers Odafe Iwhiwhi, Kennedy Ogodo and Otamedaye Onojighofia and some of their friends were in a partially completed building situate along Ekrejebo road, Ughelli playing a game of cards (WHOT) when the vigilante members and their cohorts crept in and shouted a command thus: ‘If you move, we will shoot’. The deceased persons and other persons present took to their heels in order to save their lives.

“The suspects ran after them and first shot at Odafe Iwhiwhi who fell down and identified himself as a student of the Marine School in Ogoni, Olomu in Ughelli South local government area. The vigilante members then searched him, saw the identity card, discarded it and shot him dead. The vigilante members also succeeded in getting hold of Kennedy Ogodo and Otamedaye Onojighofia who they arrested and took to their waiting pickup van together with the corpse Odafe Iwhiwhi and drove away. They subsequently murdered Kennedy Ogodo and Otamedaye Onojighofia in a cold blood and were later deposited in the Nigeria Police Station “A” Division, Ughelli.

“Some of the friends of the deceased persons who were present at the scene luckily escaped and are willing to tell the true story of what has happened over the broad daylight killing perpetrated by their killers and their cohorts whom some officers of the A Division, Surveillance Squad are apparently and inexplicable covering up. The friends of the deceased emphatically assert that there was no robbery incident along Ekrejebo road on that faithful day,” it added.

Attempts by our reporter to speak with the leader of the team at A Division, Mr Macaulay Imuni and Police Public Relations in the state, DSP Celestina Kalu, were unsuccessful. But sources had initially said that the police acted on a distress call, adding that when they got to the scene, they found the suspects “absconding”.

“This resulted in a gun exchange during which three of the suspects were felled by superior gunfire from the police.”

However, Mr Festus Onojighofia, older brother of Otamedaye, also debunked police’ position, insisting that the “family is prepared to get to the root of the matter.”

The killing is generating tension between the law enforcement agents and community leaders in the area. It was learnt that the incident, which wasn’t the first, has also pitched some traditional title holders against the police.

It was gathered that earlier in the year, a local vigilante team had also shot dead a local tricycle operator at Oveto Street in the town. Although the suspect was arrested by troops of 222 Battalion of the Nigerian Army Agbarha-Otor, nothing much has been heard of the incident afterwards.

The three suspects who were handed over to the Ughelli ‘B’ Division police station the following day were identified as Peter Oghenechuko of the Ughelli Vigilante Council, UVC, Sunny Oyovwire and Fidelis Onwah with two single barrel guns, 4 live cartridges and a cutlass recovered from.

A female passenger of the diseased (name withheld) who witnessed the incident, said the diseased was shot at the back of his head by one of the vigilante members who had accosted them along Oveto street, following an argument between the Okada rider and the vigilante members.

The person who allegedly pulled the trigger, said it was not deliberate, adding: “I wanted to shoot into the air to scare him while he (Okada rider) tried to ram into me with his motorcycle when the gun exploded and hit him at the head.”

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