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## From cell to grave

Posted By: KUNLE AKINRINADE on: January 28, 2017 In: Saturday Magazine No Comments

***KUNLE AKINRINADE examines the pathetic cases of Nigerians who died of torture while in the custodies of security agencies, the lack of justice for victims and the need to halt forcible extraction of confessions from suspects as requested by the international treaty to which the country is a signatory.***

THE greatest battle Moriamo Quadri fought till she breathed her last in November 2016 was not the cancer of the breast that eventually terminated her life. It was her fruitless quest for justice over the killing of her husband, Ismaila Quadri, allegedly by men of Ipaja Police Station in Alimosho area of Lagos State.

Moriamo's husband, Ismaila Quadri, a baker, was arrested by policemen led by one Corporal Mayowa Obaniyi a.k.a. Mayor and Waheed on September 8, 2011, on the suspicion that he was an Indian hemp smoker. Quadri, a native of Igbemo-Ekiti, Ekiti State, who ran a flourishing Olusola Bakery on 29 Andrew Kalu Crescent, Baruwa, Ipaja, where he also built a house, was dragged out of his bakery, beaten and handcuffed before he was dragged to the police station. All entreaties from other landlords in the area fell on deaf ears.

To make him confess to the unsubstantiated allegation, he was subjected to further beating with his hands tied backward to a stationery motorcycle at the station. He was kicked, whipped and hit with hard objects by the two policemen until he fell into a coma and was untied from the stationery motorcycle.

The errant policemen first rushed him to a private hospital in the neighbourhood, where doctors confirmed his spinal cord had broken and referred him to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), Ikeja, where he died.

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The then spokesman of the Lagos Police Command, Mr. Samuel Jinadu, a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), had told our correspondent that the late Quadri was arrested for being in possession of Indian hemp, adding that the police officers involved had been arrested and would be dealt with if found guilty.

He said: "Well, we have arrested two policemen in connection with the case and if they are found culpable, we will take decisive action and they will be dealt with. The matter has been transferred to the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) Panti, Yaba, Lagos, and investigation is still ongoing.

"I was told the policemen went on a general raiding of Indian hemp smokers in the area when they arrested the deceased but I cannot confirm to you if he was beaten or not. I couldn't offer you my comment on the matter the last time you called because the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) (Mr. Chikezie Okezie) of the station involved had not properly briefed me about the incident but he later did," he added.

On April 4, 34-year-old Saheed Eytayo was arrested by operatives of the State Security Services (SSS) at his residence on Aje Street, Pleasure area of Iyana Ipaja, Lagos, accused of being friends with a suspect involved in the cloning of Lagos State governor, Akinwunmi Ambode's mobile phone.

His arrest reportedly took place at about 2.30 am. He was said to have been handcuffed and taken to the Shangisha detention centre of the secret police. He was said to have been hale and hearty while he was being taken to the SSS detention facility but returned in a body bag. He was said to have been beaten to death shortly after he was taken into custody.

Like Quadri and Eytayo, a 400-level student of the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Benue State, Samuel Chimezie Omeagwa, met his tragic death in similar circumstances on May 16, 2016. As the story goes, Omeagwa and one of his friends, Ekene, were arrested by the operatives of Police

Thunder Zone 4 Office, Old G.R.A, Makurdi, for complicity in the case of a stolen phone.

At the station, they were allegedly laid on the bare floor with a flash-light permanently fixed to their faces as they were tortured by an officer nicknamed ‘Undertaker’. By the time he was released to his parents the following day, Omeagwa had become unconscious and had to be rushed to the Federal Medical Centre, Makurdi, where he died.



The same fate befell a 70-year-old transporter and chieftain of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Pa Gbenga Omolo, who was allegedly tortured to death while he was being detained by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Ondo State Police Command. Omolo was reportedly tortured by police officers for several hours at the SARS office on Oda Road, Akure, the state capital. He died in their custody after he was mercilessly beaten by the minions of law. His offence, according to his union’s members who staged a protest over his death, was that he had the effrontery to question a police officer in mufti for obstructing traffic on Arakale Road in Akure on May 26, 2015.

The former spokesman of the state Police Command, Wole Ogodo, said the policemen involved in the act have been arrested and detained at the Police Headquarters along Igbatoro road, Akure, for further investigation on the incident while the state commissioner of police had invited the family members of the deceased to his office to discuss the matter. That was the last that was heard about the case.

The case of two suspects, Sodiq Omobowale and Waheed Kabir, who were arrested by men of Ikorodu Police Station, further exposed the fatal use of torture on suspects. Omobowale was arrested in his home on July 7, 2015 on suspicion that he was a member of a secret cult. Attempts made by his family members to secure his bail were rebuffed by policemen at the station. A few days later, he was said to have been tortured to death, while his body had not been released to his parents at press time.

Kabir (26), a musician, was also arrested during a raid by policemen from the same station on November 20, 2015 on the suspicion that he belonged to a secret cult. His father made fruitless efforts to secure his bail. It later emerged that Kabir was tortured to death in police custody and his body was not released to his parents for burial to date.

The immediate past spokesman of the Lagos Police Command, Mr Joe Offor, in a telephone conversation with The Nation, said: “Following the alleged abduction of Waidi Kabir and the petition sent to the Lagos State Police Command by his parents, the Commissioner of Police (CP), Mr Fatai Owoseni, questioned the DPO and asked him to provide evidence of the identity of the surety to whom the suspect was released to on bail.

“The DPO later brought a bail bond signed by the surety following which the CP ordered him to either produce the suspect or the surety within four days. The DPO at the expiration of the ultimatum could not produce either the suspect or his surety. Hence, the CP ordered his arrest and detention at the SCID while investigation is ongoing.

“At the end of our investigation, we shall issue a public statement on the outcome of our findings in the matter.

But Offor said the case of Sodiq Omobowale had not been formally brought to the attention of the Lagos State Police Command for action. He said: “Unlike Waidi’s case that was reported to us, we have only read about the case of Omobowale in the media. The police can only act on complaints officially brought to our attention and necessary action shall be taken on such matter.”

Other security agencies, including the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), are not left out of the tortured-to-death syndrome. A 38-year-old local government employee in Sokoto State, Jamilu Abdullahi, died in the custody of the State Command of NSCDC in 2015, while a fraud suspect, Desmond Nunugwo, reportedly died in the custody of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in June 2016 during interrogation.

Disregard for treaty against torture

The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (commonly known as the United Nations Convention Against Torture) is an international human rights treaty under the review of the United Nations, which aims to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading acts around the world.

Article 16 of the convention requires countries to take effective measures to prevent torture in any territory under their jurisdiction, and forbids states from transporting people to any country where there is reason to believe they will be tortured.

The text of the convention was first adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1984 and, following its ratification by the initial signatory states, it came into force on 26 June 1987, which is also known as the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. Since the convention came into force, the absolute prohibition against torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment has become accepted as a principle of customary international law. About 160 countries had become signatories to the convention as at October 2016.

Nigeria is one of the signatories to the international treaty, which prohibits the use of torture and other inhuman measures to extract confessions from suspects or detainees. The country signed the treaty on July 28, 1988, and ratified the protocol on June 28, 2001, about 13 years after it was signed. The use of torture to coerce suspects to confess or make confessional statement is also extraneous to Nigerian laws, but virtually all the law enforcement agencies in the country have turned their operational centres into torture chambers where suspects and detainees are subjected to horrific and dehumanising treatments resulting in death and permanent disability, in some cases.

The disregard for civility during interrogation is further worsened by the lack of the political will to enact a law against the continuous use of cruelty by the Nigerian authorities. In July last year, the police announced they were reviewing the Force Orders, including Force Order 237, which allows police officers to shoot suspects and detainees who attempt to avoid arrest or escape, whether or not they pose a threat to life, but the review was not carried out as promised by the immediate past Inspector General of Police, Solomon Arase, till he left office, while no effort has been made by his successor towards fulfilling the promise to date.

Also, the Anti-Torture Bill- initiated to prohibit and criminalise the use of torture passed by the National Assembly in 2015 is yet to be signed into law. The bill was introduced in 2012 and passed its final reading in June 2015, but was returned by the Presidency to the parliament for modification of certain 'controversial' clauses and has not seen the light of day since.

#### Death chambers

The mode of torture include merciless beating with iron or wooden objects, whipping with cane or belts, suffocation, choking, nail or tooth extractions, sitting on sharp objects, electric shock, suspending detainees from a rod, hitting with gun butts, spraying suspects' face with tear gas, starvation, kicking, while some are shot in the leg during interrogation and left to bleed to death.

Giving a chilling account of the treatment meted to her husband by men of the Ipaja Police Station, Moriamo said: "My husband never drank alcohol nor smoke cigarette, let alone Indian hemp. He was arrested right inside his bakery while he was supervising his workers on night shift. He was beaten, kicked and handcuffed.

"When I rushed to the scene alongside other landlords in the area, we pleaded with the policemen to take it easy with him but they refused. He was further dragged to their station and chained to a motorcycle parked there and further brutalised.

" The policemen used big sticks to beat him and banged his head repeatedly against hard objects during interrogation. By the time he was unchained, he could no longer stand up and had to beg people to assist him. He was then taken to a private hospital at about 2 am and later transferred to LASUTH where he died.'

An eyewitness, who asked not to be named, reportedly narrated how Eyitayo was subjected to brutality at the point of arrest, saying: "I overheard Eyitayo telling the SSS people that the person they were looking for did not stay with him. He told them the suspect was his friend and only visited him the previous day. But his explanation did not convince them. They beat him mercilessly till blood came out of his face. We could not recognise him again."

Some relations who also saw his body after it was released for burial by the SSS said there were bruises and wounds on it. "If you see the corpse, you would know that he was tortured and killed in a brutal manner. He had two deep cuts in the back of his head, apparently inflicted with a machete or other sharp objects. There were cuts and bruises all over his body," said a family member who did not want his name in print.

Abdullahi, a graduate of the College of Agriculture, Bakura in Zamfara State, who until his death was an employee of Tureta Local Government Area, Sokoto State, was said to have died from injuries sustained from the torture inflicted on him during interrogation at the Sokoto South divisional headquarters of the NSCDC command.

Crying for justice, his mother, Hajiya Binta Abdulahi, said: "There was a misunderstanding between him and one woman in our neighbourhood and she reported the matter to the Sokoto South Divisional Headquarters of the NSCDC whose men came around 6.30 pm and arrested him.

"We visited the headquarters several times to seek his release. Instead, they tortured him to coma, after which they took him to the Sokoto Specialist Hospital for medical attention because of the injuries they inflicted on him. He was later referred to the Usmanu Danfodiyo Teaching Hospital, where he died on Friday, May 29, 2015. They brought his corpse to us but we rejected it because there was no certification concerning his death from the hospital. We, therefore, insisted on knowing the cause of his death, especially when signs of torture were noticed all over his body," she added.

#### Damning report

A research jointly carried out by the Prisoners' Rehabilitation and Welfare Action (PRAWA) and Network on Police Reforms in Nigeria (NOPRIN) within the same period also indicted Nigerian security forces for alleged excessive use of torture, leading to the death of several detainees and suspects in their custody.

The right groups in a report in March 2011 said a team of lawyers, psychologists and medical practitioners were involved in the study carried out in Enugu State. The report of the study based on sample population of 176 victims, according to the local human right groups, shows that "victims of torture ranged between the ages of 13 to 54 years, with young people between the ages of 26 and 30 as the most frequent victims of torture in the state.

"Method of torture on the victims include prolonged detention in police custody, gunshot wounds, 24.71%, severe beatings with police baton and other dangerous objects, 36.21%, burning with hot objects, 8.05%, squeezing of testicles and inserting objects into the penis, insertion of nails on feet, 1.72%, electric shock, suspension on the tree in different positions, 13.22%, cutting with cutlass, 12.64% and other forms of torture.

"The Special Anti- Robbery Squad (SARS) have police officers who are specially designated to torture crime suspects. Such police officers have an unofficial designation like "OC Torture" (Officer In Charge of Torture), and they have special skills in inflicting various methods of torture on their victims."

A recent report of the global rights organisation, Amnesty International (AI), also carpeted the Nigerian security forces for alleged violation of human rights in the use of torture resulting in extra-judicial killings and cruel treatment of suspects and detainees, including children. The organisation accused the Nigerian government of condoning torture in violation of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights; United Nation Convention Against Torture and the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

In the 62-page report published in 2015 and titled, "Welcome to Hell, Torture and Other Ill-Treatment in Nigeria", presented by AI's Senior Researcher, Nicola Duckworth, a Senior Researcher and Africa Advocacy Director, Netsanet Belay, indicted the police and military for brutal torture and extra-judicial killing of detainees and suspects, including children held in their custody.

"Torture is a routine occurrence in Nigeria, largely to extract 'confessions' or as punishment for alleged crimes, and hundreds of suspects in police and military custody across the country are being subjected to a range of physical and psychological torture or other ill-treatments while security forces act in a climate of impunity," the report said.

Some of the torture techniques commonly used by the security forces, AI said, include "Beating, (including with whips, gun butts, machetes, batons, sticks, rods and cables); rape and sexual assault (including inserting bottles and other objects into woman's private part); shooting people in the leg, foot or hand during investigation; extracting nails, teeth, fingerprints and toenails with pliers; suspending detainees upside down by their feet for hours. Tying detainees to a rod by their knees and elbows and suspending them as on a roasting spit; starvation; forcing people to sit, lie or roll on sharp objects such as glass or board with nails; electric shocks, including administering shocks to the genitals; choking with ropes until victims faint; 'tabay' – when officers tie detainees elbows are behind their backs and suspend them; and 'water torture' – when hot and cold water are poured on naked bodies."

"Amnesty International found that torture is such a routine and systemic part of policing that many police sections in various states, including the SARS and CID, use designated 'torture chambers': special interrogation rooms commonly used for torturing suspects. These are often known by different names such as 'the temple' or 'the theatre', and are in some cases under the charge of an officer known informally as 'O/C Torture' (Officer in Charge of torture).

"Although reports of torture emanate from most police stations, several human rights defenders, lawyers and police officers told Amnesty International that torture is particularly common in the SARS police stations across Nigeria. Amnesty International was able to visit the SARS detention centre in the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja – known as the abattoir – in July 2009. Suspects were held in a disused warehouse located outside the city. Amnesty International delegates saw at least 30 empty bullet cases on the floor and chains hanging on the wall. There were visible signs of blood in the gutter. The situation was similar during a second visit in October 2012."

It said the abuses also violate the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women; Convention on the Rights of the Child and The Geneva Convention – common Article 3 and the Second Additional Protocol.

In a statement by its then spokesperson, Emmanuel Ojukwu, the police, however, discountenanced the report by Amnesty, saying: “For one, it smacks of indecency and intemperate language to liken our dear nation Nigeria, to hell fire. That cannot be true. We believe that Nigeria is a growing nation, green and largely peaceful,” it said.

“While the Nigeria Police and other operators in the criminal justice sector are undergoing systematic reforms, and aligning themselves with the demands of democracy, there is no gainsaying the fact that the Nigeria Police Force has since improved its operational efficiency and effectiveness. Since the dawn of democracy in 1999, the Nigeria Police Force has significantly improved on its human rights records, owing largely to training and re-training, community policing, attitudinal change and structural transformation.”

Ojukwu added: “At no time in its report did Amnesty speak or interface with the Police authorities. This obviously shows their disdain and apparent lack of character where the democratic tenets of fair hearing are concerned. The report covered a seven-year period of 2007-2014. I dare say that some of the issues raised have since been dispensed with and settled.

“However, the Police shall meticulously scan through the document and investigate any current human rights abuses linked to any officer or formation. Any identified and established case of malfeasance or misconduct shall be treated in line with the laws and regulations.”

Smokescreen

In the case of Quadri, the police tried to cover up its indiscretion by writing a letter asking the authorities of LASUTH to release Quadri's body, which was then awaiting autopsy, for immediate burial according to Islamic rites.

In the handwritten letter, dated September 19, 2011, the then Divisional Police Officer (DPO) of the Ipaja Police Station, Mr. Chikezie Okesie, requested LASUTH to immediately release the body for burial based on the alleged complaint of a family member called Vincent. But the request was turned down by the hospital management for reasons bordering on absence of proper autopsy on the body and duly signed inquest note by a Magistrate.

Besides, the family of the late baker faulted the claim made by the police in the letter that the body should be released to a family member called Vincent. In a statement, a relation of the deceased, Akeem Bello, said Vincent whom the police referred to in the letter, was not known to the family, as they are mainly Muslims.

The allegation that the deceased was tortured to death was confirmed to be true after a report issued by the Pathology Department of LASUTH on Quadris' autopsy which indicated that he was brutalised to death while in police custody.

A copy of the report signed by one Dr. U. V. Okeke of the Department of Pathology and Forensic Medicine, LASUTH, revealed that the deceased died as a result of “blunt force trauma and subdural haematoma.” The two conditions, according to findings, are corollary to each other and can only be caused by violent bang on the head or parts of the body, depending on circumstances. Following the revelation, the policemen involved were dismissed from service and arraigned for murder, which has not led to conviction almost five years after they were arraigned.

Subsequently, a letter dated November 20, 2011 and signed by Senior Special Assistant (SSA) to Gov. Babatunde Fashola on Public Law, Bola Agunbiade, was forwarded to the office of the Inspector General of Police, Afiz Ringim in Abuja and that of Lagos State Police Commissioner, Mr. Yakubu Alkali.

The letter titled “Re: Alleged murder of Quadri Olushola Ismail by police” reads in part: “The Public Advice Centre is an initiative of the Lagos State Government, a department in the Ministry of Justice saddled with the responsibility of providing residents with easy access to information and advice which will benefit and improve their lives and ensure that the rights of residents are not violated.

“We are in receipt of a complaint from one Mrs. Moriamo Quadri of No 29 Kalu Crescent, New London, Baruwa, Ipaja, Lagos State. She alleged that she is the wife of Late Ismaila Olushola Quadri. She told us that on 7th of September 2011, a team of policemen went to Oke Oko, New London in Baruwa, Ipaja to raid.

“According to the complaints, the team of policemen was led by one Corporal Mayowa Obaniyi aka Mayor. Our complainants further alleged that the police officers arrested several young men in that area including her late husband Ismaila Quadri who was inside the premises of his bakery when the team of police arrived the area. We were also informed that when the deceased was arrested, the members of the landlords’ association on the day of arrest met the police officers and told ‘Mayor’ that Ismail Quadri was a man of peace and good character. Those arrested were taken away to Ipaja Police Station.

“Mariam Quadri further told us that when her late husband was taken to the station, his hands were tied backwards and fastened to a motorbike within the premises and he was tortured and in the process he fainted. The deceased’s wife stressed that the police officers rushed her husband to Agape Hospital, Olude bus stop, Ipaja where he received treatment for about seven days and was transferred to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) Ikeja where he later died.

“According to the death certificate which was signed by Dr. U.V Okeke of the Department of Pathology and Forensic Medicine LASUTH, the deceased died of Subdural Haematoma and blunt Force Trauma.

“Subsequently, we seek on behalf of the family of the deceased an adequate compensation and diligent prosecution of this case. We also urge the Inspector General of Police to use his good office to ensure a thorough investigation and to ensure that the ends of justice are served.”

It happened that the police is yet to compensate Quadri’s bereaved family to date.

In the case of Eytayo, the SSS initially kept mum on his whereabouts despite persistent enquiries by his family members and friends. Following the pressure mounted by his family members, the SSS, 19 days later, claimed that Eytayo was resisting arrest on the night of the raid and had tried to jump from the moving van as he was being taken to their Shangisha office. They claimed that he died from the injuries he sustained in the process.

The deceased’s family, however, claimed that Eytayo was already unconscious when he was handcuffed and dragged into the waiting van. The family said it was not possible for an unconscious man in chains to overpower SSS operatives and jump to his death.

“We had gone to the SSS office several times, and they told us, ‘come back, you cannot see him,’ until finally on the 23rd (of April), 19 days after he was killed, they told one of my brothers, Oyetunji, that he had died. Meanwhile, they had told the landlord not to tell anybody that he had died. They did that so that as the days elapsed, they would be able to manufacture lies to cover up the official criminality.

Having exhausted all the tricks to cover up their tracks, the secret police authorities reportedly decided to compensate Eytayo’s family and enlisted the support of a frontline Yoruba monarch, who brokered a peace deal that led to a N15 million compensation for Eytayo’s bereaved family to shield the men responsible for Eytayo’s death from prosecution.

Although the DPO of Ikorodu Police Station, Remi Adesoye, initially claimed that Kabir was released to a family member called Akala, his father faulted his claim. The celebrated case led to the removal of the DPO of the station after he failed to produce Kabir or his supposed uncle to whom he was released, as directed by the state Commissioner of Police, Fatai Owoseni.

Although, the community leaders intervened to dissuade Kabir’s parents from taking further action on the matter, his dissatisfied elder brother, Lekan, instituted an action at a Federal High Court sitting in Lagos. In a landmark judgment, the court in October 2016 ordered the police to pay his family the sum of N200 million as compensation for Kabir’s death in custody. The ruling has since been appealed by the police at a Court of Appeal sitting in Lagos, despite not making any representation throughout the duration of the suit at the lower court.

Justice delayed

The poor criminal justice system in the country provides a shield for perpetrators of torture and denial of justice for victims. In Nigeria, confessional statements obtained from torture are mostly relied upon during trial in cases involving capital punishment and, in certain instances, minor offences like stealing or fraud.

Victims of fatal brutality in custody hardly get justice due to the weakness of the criminal justice system, whereby cases bordering on right violation drag for too long. Delay in dispensation of justice in the country is one of the major problems confronting the administration of criminal justice as criminal trials often delay for too long, leading to perversion of justice.

A typical example is the prosecution of the two policemen, Mayowa and Waheed, over the killing of Quadri during interrogation. The errant policemen were initially arraigned before magistrate’s court in Yaba area of Lagos on a holding charge, but the case has not made any headway since 2012, due to

incessant adjournments till the late baker's wife, Moriamo, died last month.

"We kept going to court while the case was incessantly adjourned. At a point, the accused persons were not brought to court. For several weeks, we were told that the court was waiting for an advice from the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (DPP).

"To my greatest surprise, the case against one of the policemen who tortured my husband to death, Mayowa, was dropped and he is now roaming free. The other one (Waheed) has not been convicted to date because of unnecessary delayed trial and adjournments," Moriamo expressed her frustration a few months before she died in November last year.

The NSCDC authorities in Sokoto have also employed delay tactics by setting up a panel whose report is yet to be made public almost two years later, instead of bringing its operatives allegedly responsible for the death of Abdullahi to justice.

The Sokoto State Commandant of the NSCDC, Alhaji Muhammad Musa, reportedly said they were investigating the matter and assured that justice would take its course as they would not spare the culprits. But that was all about the incident as the bereaved family were neither compensated nor the culprits prosecuted. To date, the officers responsible for the brutal killing of Omola in custody in Ondo have not been fished out let alone prosecuted. The state Police Commissioner merely engaged his family for possible amicable solution.

The inability of the families of the victims—Quadri, Abdullahi and Omola—to get justice over the brutal killing of their patriarchs underscores the need to reform the country's poor criminal justice system and the discontinuation of cruel extraction of confessional statements from suspects.

Also, most of the victims of torture do not get justice because their families are ensnared by lack of money to hire lawyers and institute legal action against the culprits and their law enforcement agencies.

"Extrajudicial executions, other unlawful killings and enforced disappearances in Nigeria are not random. In a country where bribes guarantee safety, those who cannot afford to pay are at risk of being shot or tortured to death by the police."

"The family of the victims often cannot afford to seek justice or redress, because they cannot pay for a lawyer or the court charges. In many cases, they cannot even afford to retrieve the body. In many cases, detainees wait for weeks or months in police custody to be charged and brought before a court," PRAWA and NOPRIN noted.

#### Experts speak

A human rights lawyer, Austin Okanlawon, condemned the use of torture or other cruel methods to extract confession from suspects or detainees.

"What the law says is that only the courts can pronounce a suspect guilty, and in this circumstance, the security forces, including the police, should always make recourse to the law. The duty of law enforcement agents is to arraign a suspect in court and provide evidence for prosecution during trial.

"It is criminal for minions of law to beat suspects to death during interrogation because that is nothing but murder. Any policeman, SSS operative or other law enforcement agent who does that should be punished for such misconduct."

Chairperson of Lawyers Without Borders in Nigeria, Angela Uwandu, said the use of torture to investigate or extract confession from suspects is illegal.

She said: "Torture is condemnable because the role of the security agencies is to protect the people. But where the same group of people are brutalising or using torture as a means or tool of investigation, it is absolutely condemnable.

"Torture, as we know, is illegal. However, it is in use currently in Nigeria by our security agencies. It is an action we condemn very strongly. And we are working to ensure that we promote accountability in the system to ensure that perpetrators of torture are held accountable, especially where they are state actors.

"Because as we know, the role of the security agencies really is to protect us. But where we have the same group of people brutalising or using torture as a means or tool of investigation, we stand very strongly against that."

The Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP) called for quick passage of anti-torture bill by the National Assembly.

In a statement, LEDAP’s Executive Programmes Director, Adaobi Egboka, also urged the Federal Government to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of torture in the country.

The discontinuation of torture or cruel means of extracting confession from suspects and detainees, and prosecution of erring law enforcement agents as well as overhauling of the nation’s criminal justice system will no doubt stop or prevent loss of lives in the custody of security forces in the country.

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