

# Two killed as Shi'ites, police clash again in Abuja

•Commuters, motorists flee •Buhari mourns as body of Channels TV reporter Owolabi is sent to parents



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**•DCP Umar buried •Falana urges govt, sect to dialogue, obey rule of law**  
**•Shi'ites deny killing police chief, reporter •Sect buries its dead in Suleja**

It was a second day of bloodshed yesterday in Abuja, the nation's capital, as members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) clashed with the police at the popular Banex Junction in Wuse 2.

Security operatives waited in their vehicles at the junction for the protesters, following hints that the Shi'ites would stage another protest at 2 p.m.

Eyewitnesses told our reporter that the pandemonium started when the protesters were marching towards the police and throwing stones at them.

The police, according to another eyewitness, started firing gunshots and tear gas to disperse the protesters while about two Shi'ite members were killed in the process.

The armed policemen, who blocked the road leading to the popular Banex Plaza, ensured that nobody drove through the area.

The clash sparked panic as anxious workers, commuters and motorists fled in fear of an eventuality while the city witnessed serious traffic jam around Wuse 2.

Many vehicles were said to have been vandalised during the clash; business owners locked their shops.

The body of the *Channels Television* reporter, Mr Precious Owolabi, whom was killed during a clash in Abuja between members of Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) and the police, has been sent to his parents in Zaria, Kaduna State.

The 23-year-old National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member died when he was reportedly hit by a stray bullet on the scene of the protest.

The management of the television announced his death during its 10 p.m news on Monday.

Confirming the development to *The Nation*, a source said: "They are taking the body of Precious Owolabi to his parents in Zaria now."

On the claim that Owolabi died because he was denied treatment in the hospital he was taken to, the source added: "It is not true. He was taken to Amana Hospital in Area 8, Abuja, which happens to be *Channels* Staff Clinic. After examining him, he was referred to Garki or National Hospital. It's because Garki is closer he was taken to Garki. Unfortunately, the surgeon to operate him was not available.

"After the doctors stabilised him, he was taken to the National Hospital, but he later died."

It was learnt that the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) in charge of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Police Command, Usman Umar, who also died during the protest, has been buried according to Islamic rites.

President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday commiserated with the families of the late Owolabi and DCP Umar.

The President also condoled with the management and workers of *Channels Television* and police leadership over the deaths.

## Read also: **Video: Residents flee over Shiites protest in Abuja**

In a statement by his Special Adviser (SA) on Media and Publicity, Mr Femi Adesina, the President urged them to remain steadfast and committed to their professional callings.

Describing Owolabi and Umar as “law-abiding, hardworking and vibrant Nigerians with a promising future,” the President described their deaths as “sad, regrettable and worrisome”.

Following his directive to the leadership of security and law enforcement agencies to safeguard the nation against such mindless attacks, President Buhari reassured residents of Abuja and other parts of the country to go about their lawful activities without fear.

He said perpetrators of the mayhem would not go unpunished, adding that no government would tolerate unceasing affront to constituted authority.

“Let nobody or group doubt or test our will to act in the higher interest of majority of our citizens,” President Buhari said.

He prayed God Almighty to grant rest to the souls of the departed and speedy recovery to the injured.

Activist lawyer Mr Femi Falana (SAN) yesterday urged the Federal Government and the Shi'ites to obey the rule of law.

In a statement on the clashes between the Islamic sect and law enforcement agencies, Falana said: “The protest of the Shi'ite Movement, which turned violent in Abuja yesterday (on Monday), leading to the loss of precious lives, was unfortunate. Just as we condemned the brutal massacre of hundreds of Shi'ites by the Army in the past, we also condemn the avoidable deaths of the police officer and the *Channels Television* reporter as well as others during the protests. We deeply sympathise with the bereaved family members of the deceased.

“However, since the fundamental rights of citizens to freedom of religion and freedom of expression are recognised by the Constitution of Nigeria, we urge the Federal Government to enter into dialogue with the Islamic Movement of Nigeria with a view to finding a lasting solution to the crisis between the Sunnis and the Shi'ites. Both sides should embrace the rule of law. In particular, we call on the Muhammadu Buhari administration to ensure that all valid and subsisting court orders are obeyed without any further delay.”

The Shi'ites yesterday denied complicity in Monday's killing of DCP Musa and *Channels Television* reporter, Precious Owolabi.

The Sheikh Ibraheem El-Zakzaky-led Islamic sect, however, said the victims may have been victims of “friendly fire”.

A statement by the forum's President Ibrahim Musa said Owolabi fell victim to a shooting spree by the police during the protest.

He said members of the sect do not carry weapons and could not have been responsible for the deaths of the senior policeman and the reporter.

The statement said: "Yesterday (Monday), the Nigeria Police Force headquarters issued a statement in which it ascribed the death of DCP Usman A. K. Umar in particular to the Islamic Movement in Nigeria under the leadership of the illegally detained Sheikh Ibraheem El-Zakzaky. We vehemently condemn such insinuation, which we believe was done in bad taste to once again tarnish our hard-earned credit as the only non-violent movement in the country.

"A quick analysis of images and video clips showed that the 'Free Zakzaky' procession was peacefully progressing prior to the brutal crackdown. It also clearly showed that the protesters weren't bearing arms, as usual, and traffic was moving without hindrance.

"Furthermore, the images also showed the police, armed to the teeth, were intent on stopping the movement of the protesters at all cost. Few other policemen and plain cloth security agents were seen piling used tyres for use to make bonfires. By the time the police struck, about a dozen members of the Islamic Movement had been killed. The police were seen picking the bodies to an undisclosed location, perhaps for mass burial.

"Also shot were the *Channels TV* reporter, Precious Owolabi, and their colleague, a Deputy Commissioner of Police, whom photographs showed was struck from the back of his head with the bullet exit in front, an indication that he was a victim of a friendly fire.

"It is a known fact among the intelligence community that you don't retreat from a mob with your back turned against them. This is one of the tenets of crowd control for law enforcement agencies. As if to hide this fact, the late policeman was hurriedly buried without any form of post-mortem examination, which would have revealed the source of the bullet.

"It seems the security agents strategically killed the journalist to turn the media against us. They also killed the police officer to incite the security community against us and to stigmatise us. They are the ones with guns and they are the ones doing the shootings and the killings. Then, they fraudulently lie to Nigerians that their victims are the violent ones!

"They are working hard to portray the Islamic Movement in Nigeria as a terrorist organisation. That is why they have started killing people in our name, including our supporters. We decry such shameless play with people's lives with reckless abandon.

“We, therefore, call on the Federal Government detaining our leader, Sheikh El-Zakzaky and his wife, Malama Zeenah Ibrahim, preventing them from seeking proper medication, to toe the line of House of Representatives that some weeks ago called on it to address the root cause of this needless spilling of innocent blood. This is the contemptuous disregard of a Federal High Court order granting the sheikh his freedom and fundamental human rights.

“Finally, on behalf of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, we wish to commiserate with the friends and families of those needlessly killed by this police brutality. In particular, our heartfelt condolences go to the slain officer’s and the journalist’s families and the *Channels Television* as well.”

The sect members yesterday threatened to continue their protest today, despite the killing of their members and warning from President Buhari.

The sect spoke at the funeral of their dead members in Suleja, the Niger State capital.

A statement by the Abdullahi Muhammad Musa, of Academic Forum of the Islamic Movement, said: “Police carnage against followers of Sheikh Zakzaky continues senselessly. Yesterday, at the Federal Secretariat (in Abuja), the bureaucratic seat of the Nigerian government, police gunned down close to 40 protesters, injured scores and arrested very many...”

“Senseless killings as these can never put off a conceptual cause as the Islamic movement is, and the struggle continues...”

The Media Rights Agenda (MRA) yesterday condemned the killing of Mr. Owolabi.

A statement by its Programme Director, Ayode Longe, said: “This latest incident of needless death highlights once again the primitive nature of policing methods in Nigeria, which places no premium on the human life and where police officers, who are supposed to respect, preserve and protect human life, respond to protests and riots by firing live bullets indiscriminately into crowds.”

“We are concerned that rather than adopt non-lethal incapacitating weapons in response to protests or even riots, the police have consistently demonstrated a preference for the use of excessive force in dispersing crowds during protests and quelling riots with the result that unjustifiable deaths frequently arise from such situations, including of innocents and bystanders.”

MRA urged the Federal Government not to encourage or condone impunity for such unjustifiable deaths by failing to investigate them or refusing to sanction wrongdoing and actions which violate the Law or established norms and standards.

