

Soldier 'shoots man dead' in Warri

- Omo-Agege, Keyamo condemn killing

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From Sanni Onogu, Abuja, Aiwerie Okungbowa, Asaba, Elo Edremoda, Warri, and Omolola Afolabi, Lagos

An army officer has allegedly shot dead a young man, Joseph Pessu, a father of two, in the Ugbuwangu area of the NPA Expressway, Warri, Delta State for refusing to stop for checks in the lockdown ordered by the state government.

The Nation learnt that the incident happened about 9:40am on Thursday.

It was gathered that the late Pessu, 28, was driving an unnumbered Toyota Camry, and was flagged down by a team of the security operatives, who gave a hot chase, when he refused to stop for identification.

Vexed by his action, which seemed suspicious, one of the officers was said to have shot him dead.

The victim, soaked in blood, was reportedly taken to the Police Area Command, Warri as sympathisers thronged the scene.

Sources around the scene of the incident said that he was chased from Ubeji, a nearby community to the scene of the tragic incident.

According to a source, even though the vehicle's tyres were deflated by gunshots, he continued driving until he stopped around the Ogunu Flyover of the expressway, where a bullet hit him on his back.

"It was a soldier that shot the young man. They tried to stop him for check but he drove past them. One shot at his tyres in a bid to stop him, but he drove on. He drove to a point on the expressway, stopped and tried to runaway when a bullet hit him behind. He died instantly," a source told *The Nation*.

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The state government announced a lockdown across the state for 14 days beginning on Wednesday.

Youths of the area were said to have taken to the streets and the expressway in protest of the death.

Commissioner of Police, Hafiz Inuwa, confirmed the development.

The soldier who pulled the trigger was said to have reported himself to the 'A' Division, Warri, where he was detained.

The state government has called on the military authorities to investigate the killing.

Information Commissioner Charles Aniagwu, in a statement in Asaba, said government was worried about the report of the alleged killing, and has sent a delegation to the deceased family to condole with them.

Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Hon. Festus Keyamo (SAN), has condemned Pessu's killing.

Keyamo, on his official Twitter handle, described the incident as "barbaric", noting that recent reports and images he received depict the arrogance with which military men are enforcing the sit-at-home order, especially in his home state.

The statement read, "I condemn the killing of innocent live(s) in Warri by soldiers enforcing COVID-19 lockdown. I have received disturbing reports and images of the high-handedness and shooting of innocent citizens by men of the armed forces deployed to enforce the COVID-19 lockdown in my state, Delta State.

"Specifically, I have received reports of the killing of an innocent young man, Mr. Joseph Pessu in Warri. I unreservedly condemn this barbaric act by men of the armed forces who should exercise restraint when dealing with the civilian populace".

Deputy Senate President Ovie Omo-Agege has also condemned the killing.

Describing the incident as extra-judicial killing, Senator Omo-Agege called for the arrest and prosecution of the culprit to serve as a deterrent to others, according to a statement by his spokesman, Yomi Odunuga, in Abuja.

Omo-Agege, who spoke directly with the Army and Police authorities in the state, called on all citizens of the state to desist from taking the law into their hands.

He said, "I condemn in strong terms the extra-judicial killing of Joseph Pessu by men of the Nigerian Army. And I call on the Army authorities to fish out the culprit(s) and hand them over to the police for prosecution.

"Those who are authorised to bear arms in defence of the nation ought to understand that this comes with responsibility especially when human life is sacrosanct.

"The killing in Warri today is one too many as the issue shouldn't have led to what, in my opinion, amounted to extra judicial killing of yet another future hope of this country.

"I have heard that the Army has arrested the soldier that shot the deceased, it is my belief that thorough investigations would be carried out and adequate punishment meted out to those involved in the heinous crime."

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