

Disquiet in Ondo over assassination of Owo high chief

How we escaped death from assassins' bullets —Eyewitness Says two bullets, 11 pellets removed from my skull, back, others Police arrest, question suspects

By Osagie OTABOR, Akure On Jan 1, 2022



Operatives of the Ondo State Police Command are battling to unravel the biggest murder case in Owo kingdom: the brutal killing of one of its high chiefs, Ilori Tunde, the Elerewe of Owo Kingdom. Already, some suspects have been arrested and are being questioned.

But members of the deceased's family are not happy with the police handling of the matter and have written to the Department of State Services (DSS) to take over investigation of the case.

The late Elerewe of Owo Kingdom was shot at close range by some gunmen over a disputed farmland on Owo-Ute Road. He was returning from a fact finding mission on the disputed parcel of land when he was ambushed by the masked gunmen.

He was in company of the delegation sent by the Monarch of Owo, the Olowo of Owo, Oba Ajibade Ogunoye III, to seek a peaceful resolution of the dispute over the farmland. Witnesses said he was shot in the eye while others ran for safety even though they were hit by pellets.

Protest broke out in the community and attempts were made to set ablaze the house and store of a prominent member of the community believed to have had a hand in the Elerewe's death before the timely intervention of the community's elders who promised to ensure that justice was done in the matter.

However, the late Elerewe's family members believe that the killing over the farmland was a smokescreen for the real reason the Elerewe was killed. They fingered a former Chairman of Owo local government, Oluwole Folahanmi, and other persons who were subsequently arrested and questioned.

An eyewitness, Oseni Oronbato (53), who said he was in the same vehicle with the late Chief Ilori Tunde and four other occupants when the tragic incident occurred, said: "On that fateful Wednesday, we went to the disputed farmland on the instruction of the Olowo of Owo, Oba Ajibade Gbadegesin Ogunoye III.

"On our way back, I saw two men who were part of the opposition party on a motorbike as they overtook our vehicle.

"We were six in our vehicle with a village head, Atelegi Alamuren of Ogain. He is the head of a community and we wanted to drop him at his farm camp.

"About 15 minutes after we took off, we heard the sound of a burst tyre, not knowing that it was the assailants who had fired gunshots into our tyres.

"As we stopped to take a look at the tyres, one of the masked men came closer and shot into Elerewe's eyes at close range. The bullets went into his brain and he died instantly.

"They continued to fire gunshots from behind and some pellets entered my head. I thank God that they did not enter my brain. But the pellets removed my scalp while one went into my back and another into my hand.

"It was God that rescued me from the place. I could not see the faces of the assailants because they were all masked. "The one of us who was sitting with Chief Elerewe in the front quickly opened the door and escaped but the assailants went after him. But one of us who had escaped ran back, opened the car door and seeing that I had not died, dragged me out and we started running in order to escape.

"Although I was bleeding, the two of us ran for about three miles to Amurin Agayin Farm Camp. It was from here that one of us took his (Elerewe's) phone and called his wife to tell her what had happened and they called the Amotekun, the state's security outfit.

"The Amotekun arrived to rescue us and also went to pick up Elerewe's body. They removed 11 pellets from my body and seven from my head. They also removed two bullets from my back. One of them dug a hole in my chest as X-ray revealed.

"I was taken to Akure that night where an X-ray was done on my hands, chest and other parts of my body. The hospital said they could not remove the bullets, but I was given drugs to relieve me of the pains.

"I spent four days at the Federal Medical Centre, Owo. From there, I was taken to Iyere-Owo where the traditional medical removed the bullets. But I am still having pains.

“It was cartridges that they shot at me. But I suspect that Elerewe was shot with an AK 47 and they aimed at his eye. His eye gouged out as the bullet penetrated his brain.

“I spent four days in the hospital. I also spent up to N300,000. The money was raised by my family members in addition to what I had.”

Elerewe’s widow, Doris, who wept intermittently in a chat with our correspondent, said her husband was killed over chieftaincy and land tussles.

She said: “Before and since my husband was conferred with his chieftaincy title in 2018, his opponent has been attacking him. At a time, he cooked up stories that the late Chief Elerewe was an armed robber and a killer.

“He took my husband to Abuja where he was unlawfully detained for weeks. The said suspect sold the family’s property and emptied the family’s treasury but my late husband kept his cool.

“He threatened my late husband several times that he should relinquish the title or else he would kill him. He had collected more than 10 years rent from the land, which the First Bank had their building on.

“When my late husband approached the bank and gave them quit notice and the suspect was informed, he quickly ran to the bank.

“The bank’s managers should be summoned to say what they know about these illegal transactions.

“Now, who will take care of my children? Imagine, they have hacked into my late husband’s account and deleted his account from Facebook.”



The late Elerewe's elder sister, Mrs. Adeola Olayinka (nee Elerewe), said her younger brother had not known peace since he was conferred with the family's chieftaincy title, Elerewe. According to her, the late Elerewe's problems stemmed from the chieftaincy title that was awarded him and the disputed farmland left behind by his grandfather and high chief, Olakunori Elerewe.

Olayinka said that the Owo branch of First Bank which rented the family land was given a quit notice by the late Elerewe as their rent was almost due. But his rival who had collected 10 years rent and also took a loan from the bank became jittery and had to do whatever he could to stop the deceased chief from exposing him the more.

She said: "The managers of the bank should be summoned to give evidence of the transactions. The police should investigate this thoroughly.

"I was called that evening that my brother had been shot, and when I got to Owo, I was hearing all manner of stories.

“I was told that the first shot was on the tyres, making the late chief to think it was his tyre that burst. As he stopped and was about to come out to look at the tyre, the assassins opened fire on him at close range.

“The sight of the corpse was too gory. I learnt they used AK 47 on him. We have gone spiritual. We have called his spirit and he told us who killed him. But we want all those who had hands in it to be arrested and investigated.

“They must not go scot free

“The late chief gave the First Bank branch located on the family’s ground a quit notice and some secrets leaked out. That was part of the reasons why he was killed.

“The suspect had several times threatened the late chief who was murdered in cold blood over all this. The culprits should be brought to book.”

Mrs. Kehinde Daramola (nee Olateru-Olagbegi) said her late cousin was killed for no just reason. She implored the state and federal governments to make sure that justice is served.

She said: “All Owo people know who killed Chief Elerewe. We want justice. They should investigate thoroughly and leave no stone unturned. If a man of such caliber could be killed and nothing happens, then nobody is free.

“The assassins were paid to kill the man for no just cause. It is bad. The Inspector General of Police should wade into the matter and treat it urgently because those indicted are trying to use their political power to sweep it under the carpet. This is one death too many.”

The Olowo of Owo, Oba Ajibade Gbadegesin Ogunoye III, who confirmed the incident, said the police were investigating the story. He expressed hope that justice would be done.

He, however, pleaded with the people of the community not to take the law into their own hands.

‘The late Chief Elerewe was a very good man. He was 100 per cent loyal to me. I am sad,’ he said.

When contacted for comments, Ondo Police Commissioner, Oyeyemi Oyediran, said some suspects had been arrested in connection with the killing and that investigations were still going on.

Among the suspects questioned were Idowu Obadaye, Atiloye Jacob, Aboba, Tunde Olamona, Kehinde Ogunmolawa (Okupe) Aderobagun Adekola and a former Owo Council Chairman, Oluwole Folahanmi

However, Oluwole Folahanmi, who was fingered as the main suspect in the killing, has been released by the police.

Oluwole told our reporter in a phone chat that the allegations leveled against him were false as he had no reason to kill the late Elerewe. He recalled that he contested the Elerewe chieftaincy title with the late Elerewe and topped the list but the former was later installed.

He said it was because he contested against the late Elerewe in 2010 that people are accusing him of being behind the killings.

He said: “The late Elerewe is my junior (younger) brother. Myself and others contested the chieftaincy title together. That was in 2010. I won but the title was given to him.

“I have no grudge against him. I am not concern about the land that he was killed for. The land is not my family land.

“The land on which First Bank is built is our father’s property. Whoever is the Elerewe is in charge of the bank.

“My father was a former Elerewe. He collected money for about 10 years. I do not know anything about that. They should go and meet the bank. The allegation against me is false.

“We contested for chieftaincy title. He was killed over a land dispute. I have no involvement in the land dispute. It was because I contested against him that they are mentioning my name.

“The police invited me but saw that it was false allegation. They saw that I contested against him, but if anything happens to him elsewhere, I will now be held responsible.

“When he was imposed on our family, I didn’t shoot a gun. I accepted my fate. Is it not since 2010? And I will now want to harm him? That is not possible.”

Lawyer to Folahanmi, Olatunbosun Aganun, said the police exercised its discretionary powers after preliminary investigation showed that he (Folahanmi) was not involved in any complicity in the murder case.

He said his client could not be indicted over the murder of late Elerewe just because he (Folahanmi) contested Elerewe Chieftaincy title 11 years ago.

Aganun said: “The late Chief Elerewe had land dispute with a family from Iloro Quarter of Owo and it was the scene of the land dispute that the parties visited as directed by the Traditional Arbitration mediating over the land dispute between the late Chief Tunde Ilori Elerewe and the other family.

“It was on their way back from the scene of the land dispute that the late chief was shot and killed by yet to be identified gunmen.

“Hon. Oluwole Folahanmi has no interest in the land in dispute and he is not in any way connected with the land in dispute.

“He has accepted fate upon the illegal installation of the late Tunde Ilori as the Elerewe of Owo Kingdom by the late Olowo of Owo (Oba) Dr. D.V.F. Olateru Olagbegi III over five years ago even when there was a pending litigation in court of competent jurisdiction over the Elerewe chieftaincy tussle.

“There’s no nexus between Hon. Oluwole Folahanmi and the crime, hence the police has no reason detaining him any further upon preliminary investigation.”

Not satisfied with the police investigation, wife of the late Elerewe, Olori Tolani Elerewe, in a petition to the Police Service Commission, called for a thorough investigation “on the involvement of all the investigating officers at homicide department, Akure in order to prevent a gross miscarriage of justice”.

Olori Tolani who wrote through her lawyer, T.A Oyolola, said she had lost confidence in the manner in which the case was being handled by the investigating officers.

In another petition to the DSS, Olori Tolani urged the State Director to call for the case file at state CID Akure, Ondo State for a thorough investigation in order to unravel the hideout of the killers as well as prosecute those who were involved in her husband’s killing in the interest of justice.

“Our client is willing to honour invitation from your office for the purpose of further clarifications of the above alleged offences,” the statement said.