

Christmas tragedy: Gunmen kill Catholic priest in Anambra



• **23 arrested for armed robbery, kidnapping, others**

• **Search for kidnapped legislator continues**

• **Alia talks tough on fresh killings in Benue**

• **Anglican Archbishop yet to be seen in Anambra**

The Catholic community in Anambra State was yesterday thrown into mourning following the confirmation of the killing of a priest, Chukwujekwu Okonkwo, by kidnappers.

He was shot dead on Boxing Day on the Onitsha-Owerri Expressway in one of the security breaches recorded across the country during the Christmas holidays.

Seventy-five-year-old retired Anglican Bishop of Nnewi Diocese also in the state, Most Rev Godwin Okpala, remains in kidnappers' den two weeks after his abduction.

A member of the State House of Assembly, Justice Azuka, was abducted on Tuesday night on Ugwunapampa Road in Onitsha North Local Government Area of Anambra State.

There is no information yet about his fate.

Security personnel are said to still be searching for him.

However, the police said yesterday that they arrested 23 suspects across the country for armed robbery, cultism, kidnapping and stalking of fun seekers during the period.

Soldiers arrested two suspected terrorists in Taraba State while Benue State Governor Hyacinth Alia vowed to ensure that perpetrators of the Christmas Day attacks on Anwase Community in Kwande Local Government Area are brought to justice.

Ten persons were killed in the incident by suspected herders.

News of the killing of Reverend Father Okonkwo was announced by the Chancellor of Nnewi Diocese, Rev Fr Tobias Ezeogu.

"We announce with great sorrow the brutal murder of Reverend Father Tobias Chukwujekwu Okonkwo, a devoted priest and pharmacist, who was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Ihiala, Anambra State, on Boxing Day, December 26, 2024," Ezeogu said.

He added: "Fr. Tobias was killed between 7pm and 8pm along the Onitsha-Owerri Expressway, which is a devastating loss. But we take solace with faith in divine consolation."

The deceased was born on August 11, 1984, and was ordained as a priest on July 11, 2015.

At the time of his death, he was serving as the Manager of the Schools of Nursing, Midwifery and Medical Laboratory at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Ihiala" the statement said