

Furore in Ondo over coroner's inquest into Akeredolu's death



A fresh cloud is gathering on the death of former Governor of Ondo State, Oluwarotimi Akeredolu, following a move to launch a coroner's inquest into his demise. TOSIN TOPE, in Akure, chronicles the angry reactions trailing the move.

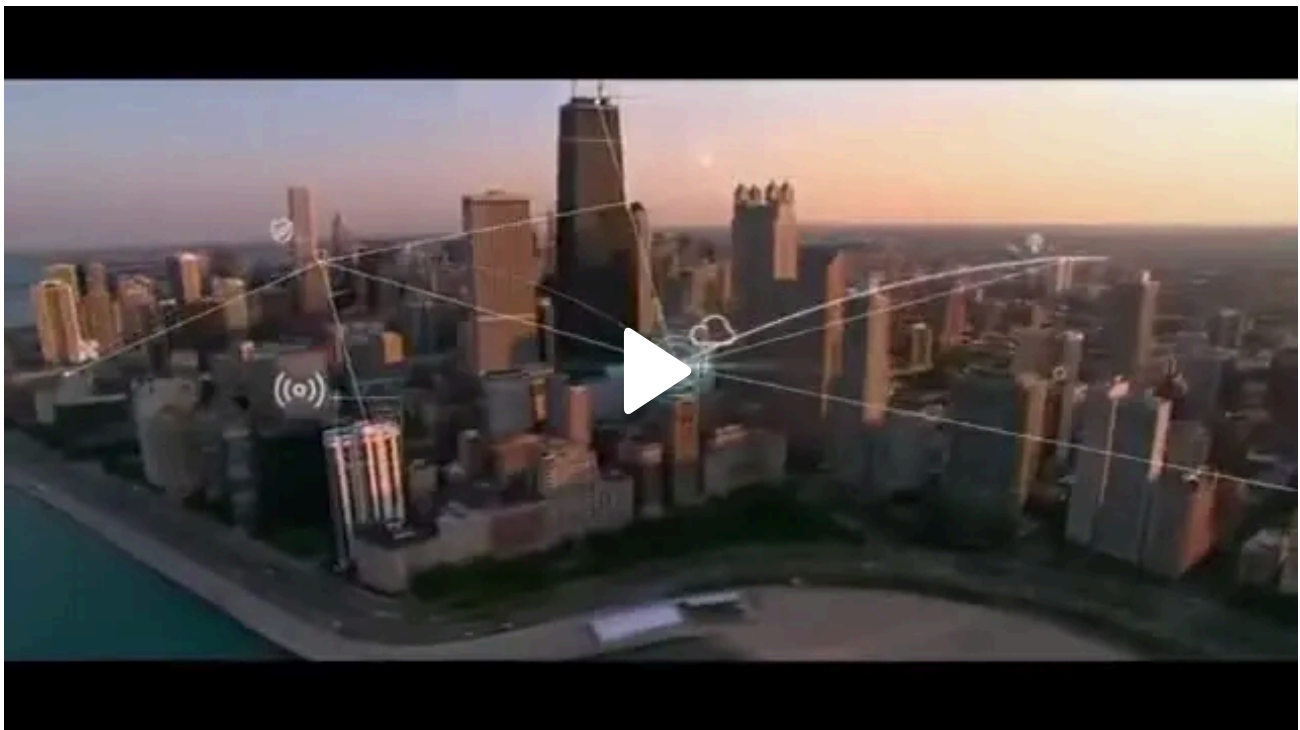
IT is close to two years that the immediate past Ondo State Governor, **Rotimi Akeredolu**, died in office. The former governor passed away in a German hospital, where he was reportedly receiving treatment for Leukaemia (cancer of the blood) and prostate cancer.

The two sicknesses had rendered the then governor of Ondo State, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), incapacitated for months and prevented him from completing the second term of his eight-years tenure.

But shortly before his death; his sickness had sparked a controversy between a member of his kitchen cabinet, Bunmi Ademosun, and his wife, Betty-Anyanwu Akeredolu.

Allegation of poisonous concoction

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In January 2023, Mrs Akeredolu made public her husband's ailment, which until then had been kept under wraps,, by crying out that the former governor was on sickbed and incapacitated after consuming a "poisonous concoction" allegedly provided by Ms Ademosun.

In a leaked video released on social media, the former first lady accused Ademosun, a former special adviser, to the late governor on Multilateral and Inter-Government Affairs, of sneaking in to give her husband the local herbs on his sick bed.

Expressing worries over husband's deteriorating condition, Mrs Akeredolu had warned the lady to 'stay away from him, saying that her persistent closeness and unorthodox approach was worsening Akeredolu's health condition.

"I warned Aketi (Akeredolu) from the beginning that this woman is evil. This woman is no good, and it's happening. She had nothing good for you, and I warned him. This woman is bloody evil.

"But I'm warning her for the very last time to stay away from my husband. I want this woman to stay away from my husband. Stop sneaking in concoctions. We rely on the western style of medical care, and Aketi will get well," she had said, accusing Mrs Ademosun of bringing in concoction in her scheming to become the deputy governor.

"What has triggered this very message was her recent meeting to become the deputy governor of the state. Look at you! What have you got upstairs to be the deputy governor of Ondo (state)?" Mrs Akeredolu queried, adding that, "if anything happens to Aketi, Lucky (Aiyedatiwa) takes over. It's a constitutional thing, but not for you to be scheming."

But Mrs Ademosun, who hailed from a royal family in Akure, was quick to respond via a statement issued by the family.

Reacting through a statement by the chairman, Elemo Adedipe Dynasty in Akure, Adedipe Olajide,, Mrs Ademosun condemned the outburst of the then first lady, saying she would be held responsible if anything happened to her.

The statement said: "The Elemo Adedipe Dynasty of Akure will hold Mrs Betty Anyanwu Akeredolu responsible and accountable should anything ontoward happen to our daughter and/or her assets (human and material).

"It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop than with a brawling woman in a wide house. It is better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman.

"Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness,," (Proverbs 21:9,19 and 25:5, 24)

"We join the good people of Ondo State to pray for the speedy recovery of Arakunrin's health so he can finish his term as Executive Governor with laudable legacies for posterity in Ondo State."

Amid the tirade of the toxic concoction between his wife and his aide, Mr Akeredolu left his sickbed to confirm his battles with an ailment, although "not a life-threatening illness", adding that he was recovering fast.

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"Since the governor is not a superhuman and the immunity his office enjoys does not extend to physical wellness or otherwise, the health issue is therefore not an unusual one," Mr Akeredolu said in a statement released by his spokesman, declaring that there was no cause for alarm even in the midst of his failing health.

In the midst of the raging controversy, the governor gave up the ghost on December 27, 2023, leaving a trail of emotions as darkness enveloped the state and tributes poured in from within and outside the state.

'Akeredolu wouldn't have died'

But three months later, Akeredolu's widow set the social media on fire when she claimed that her husband would not have died of the complications if he had heeded her advice.

Explaining that she would not have become a widow, Mrs Akeredolu said if the former governor had chosen medical practice over spiritual practices, he would have still been alive.

"What came out of their mountain climbing, 'blessed handkerchiefs, water, olive oil', etc., from the GOs and all the noisy prayers like people possessed by demons?

"If Aketi had listened to me, I wouldn't be a widow," she said.

Shortly after firing that salvo, Mrs Akeredolu was dragged by the state's Commissioner for Finance, Omowunmi Isaac, who accused the first lady of being responsible for her husband's death.

Omowunmi, a kinsman of Akeredolu also from Owo Kingdom, had in a WhatsApp conversation alleged that the late Akeredolu did not succumb to cancer as was widely believed, but was killed by his wife.

She had further alleged in the message that Mrs Akeredolu physically pushed her husband, leading to a fatal rush of blood to his brain.

Following the development, a group of civil society organisations had called on the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun, to intervene and launch an investigation into the claim, while asking Mrs Isaac to provide proof of her controversial claim and explosive allegation against Akeredolu's widow.

"The claim has serious implications for the integrity of the Akeredolu family and the reputation of the late governor, whose death had already been surrounded by medical explanations," the group said.

As the issues surrounding Akeredolu's death raged, Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa raised a fresh dust a fortnight ago with the controversial demolition of the memorial park built to immortalise the victims of the June 2, 2022 terror attack on St Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo.

The destruction of the cenotaph, constructed by the late Akeredolu, drew the ire of his widow, Betty-Anyanwu, who rebuked **Governor Aiyedatiwa** and the Olowo of Owo, Oba Ajibade Gbadegesin Ogunoye, for demolishing her husband's legacy without recourse to the victims of the violent attack, adding that the people of the ancient community had dismantled the progress they had made together.

With palpable emotion, she specifically came hard on Oba Ogunoye, describing the revered traditional ruler and Chairman, Council of Obas in Ondo State, as 'Baby Oba', saying her husband had singlehandedly installed him during his tenure as governor.

Her outburst attracted wide condemnation, especially from the natives of Owo and supporters of the Aiyedatiwa government, who accused the former first lady overbearing and dominance despite the 'controversial death' of her husband in office.

In the ensuing reactions, leaders in the community and stakeholders in the state immediately cast aspersions on Mrs Akeredolu, demanding she revealed the real cause of her husband's death and expressing doubts as to whether Akeredolu actually died of prostate cancer.

"With the heights of all these her attitude, It's better we rally our community leaders in Owo to demand the real cause behind her husband's death by launching a coroner's inquest, because her attitude, which is uncultured, is giving room for suspicion over the death of a man loved by his people," a native of the community, Adeoye Abiola, had said in a social media post.

Not long after Abiola's post, the state government confirmed the recipient of a coroner's inquest into the cause of the death of the late Akeredolu.

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In a statement issued to journalists in Akure, the State Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Kayode Ajulo, SAN, claimed that the government has received many petitions and requests urging his office to launch an investigation into the 'troubling inconsistencies' surrounding Akeredolu's death

Although Ajulo did not mention the names of the petitioners, a development that has attracted mixed reactions and feelings, he said some concerned groups have demanded coroner's inquest into the demise of the deceased governor.

Ajulo said: "We have received petitions from groups both within and outside the state, including professional bodies and even from the late Governor's hometown,.

"The petitioners urged the Attorney General to initiate an inquest to investigate the circumstances surrounding the former Governor's death.

"They raised concerns based on previous and recent public statements as well as what they described as 'unguarded and unhinged conduct' of the former First Lady, Arabinrin Betty Anyanwu-Akeredolu.

"In their petitions, she and others were explicitly named as persons of interest, with the petitioners claiming her actions cast doubt on the official narrative that the former Governor died from cancer-related complications."

In the midst of the flurry of petitions, which has drawn counter-reactions, Ajulo claimed that the citizens have the right to request the invocation of the coroners law, stating that is only designed to address public concerns surrounding deaths considered unnatural or controversial.

According to him, under the law, any citizen or group who suspects foul play or has lingering questions about a person's death has the legal right to demand a coroner's inquest.

"Let me be clear: due process will be followed. The law is there to serve the people and ensure that truth and justice prevail.

"It is not out of place for citizens to demand its invocation when there are legitimate concerns.

"The Attorney General is duty-bound to act in accordance with the law once such concerns are raised by members of the public." Ajulo said, maintaining that the law would be allowed to take its course without bias or sentiment.

Reiterating that there is a legal process for everything, the Ondo State Attorney General asked the people of the state to allow the law take its full course without prematurely casting aspersions on anyone.

With the move; residents, stakeholders, and critics of governor Aiyedatiwa-led government have expressed harsh reactions to the development, stating that the probe would open a fresh wound and heat up the polity in the state.

Many of them, who cautioned the Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice, Ajulo, against the move, also noted that the government is 'treading on an inglorious path' that could set the state on fire.

In his reaction, a resident of the state, Olugbenga Ajongbolo, said the action, if continued, could bring to an end the government of Aiyedatiwa even before the latter leaves office.

Ajongbolo also slammed the Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice for entertaining such coroner's inquest at the expense of the grieving family of the deceased.

"How do you, in the first place, entertain petitions from some faceless groups to exhume the body of the late Governor 'Rotimi Akeredolu and subject it to whatever nonsense coroner law you're invoking?

"What is this for heavens' sake! You only didn't accept the petitions, you also published it for Ondo State people, Aketi's family, and well wishers to read your ill conceived idea of being a 21st Century law keeper," he said, asking that Aiyedatiwa calls Ajulo to order.

"He is on the path to ignominy, and like the Yoruba often remind people like him, the honour given to a man who kills an elephant with his cap ends at dusk."

Querying the main purpose behind the probe, another resident, Mr Samad Orijeminiyi, said Ajulo should step down from his position as the Chief Law Officer of the state.

"That man (Ajulo) is a misfit in the office. He takes delight in 'forcing' issues everywhere! Every time! If they don't tame him, he will bring down this government,."

"I am still trying to wrap my head around whether the Governor sanctioned his new resolve for a coroner inquest. I don't know if he is at liberty to act unilaterally without consulting the governor," he said.

David Akingbade expressed shock at the endorsement of the exhumation of the late Akeredolu's body.

"How can the AG in all fairness entertain such frivolous petition? That drama is not needed at all," Akingbade said, advising that the move should be dropped without any hesitation.

Condemning the development, a social commentator in the state, Oluwasegunota Ajayi, said he had already evaluated the issues surrounding the probe but found it appalling.

He described anyone supporting the action as "those being paid to defend their duties", adding: "For Dr. Ajulo, I hope he will, in no long time, reflect the resonance and the indelibility of his actions at this time."

However, a former Minister of State for Transport, Ademola Adegoroye, acknowledged that the state government under Aiyedatiwa's watch has a responsibility to receive and act on any petition.

Adegoroye, a lawyer, noted that those behind such petitions are not lovers of peace, describing them as mischievous and calling on governor Aiyedatiwa to jettison the move to avoid giving his administration a bad image.

Noting that the inquest is unnecessary, a social commentator and lawyer, Barrister Sola Ajisafe, said proceeding with such petitions is an attack on the memory of the late former governor.

Ajisafe also criticised Ajulo, accusing him of soiling his hands by citing the reasons why the coroner's inquest was initiated for probe.

"It goes without saying that the Attorney General revealed his hand by citing the inglorious and despicable action of the wife of the late governor on the demolition of the cenotaph in Owo as the basis of his current actions without considering the bigger picture," he said.

On his part, former Head of Service in the state, Mr Ajose Kudehinbu, asked Governor Aiyedatiwa to be mindful of posterity, saying those agitating for a coroner's inquest into the death of his predecessor are against the current peace and stability under his watch in the state.

“The executive power in the state resides only in one person: the governor. Nobody else, and he’s the one to give account at the end of the day, for the good times, for the bad times, to posterity!

“The executive power should neither be diluted nor shared for whatever reason.”

He added: “When I read the story about the plan to know how Aketi passed on, I knew this could not be true or could only have come from those who lacked regard for the peace and stability of the state in which the Governor is the highest stakeholder.

“As citizens or indigenes, we owe individual or collective responsibility to see our state on the path of progress.”