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INSIDE LAGOS

Residents disturbed as corpses resurface on streets

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AYOMIDE OWONIBI
investigates possible
reasons why Lagos streets
have become temporary
morgues.

February 2, 2015

The corpse of an
unidentified woman was
discovered at Oniyanrin
Street in the Mile 12 area
of Lagos with her private
parts missing. According to
media reports, the woman
was strangled to death by

yet-to-be identified persons, who also went away with her private parts. Residents claimed they did not hear any gunshot or see any stab wound, prompting the suspicion that she was strangled to death. The corpse was abandoned in front of a shop and covered with clothes.

February 6, 2015

The body of a middle-aged woman laid covered with one item of clothing at Oshodi Oke. She was reportedly killed while trying to run across the highway that morning. The driver reportedly sped away.

Also, at Ojota Bus Stop, along Ikorodu Expressway, another man was killed by a hit-and-run driver. His corpse was removed by the police hours later.

February 18, 2015

The corpse of another woman was found at the Idiroko area of Lagos. Her body was by the side of the road.

Also, in a bid to unravel the identity of one victim of a hit-and-run case, admitted in its hospital, the management of St Nicholas Hospital in Lagos recently took to its Twitter handle to display the picture of the victim, calling on anyone who could help identify him since he was still in a coma.

However, two days later, the hospital again took to its Twitter page to announce that the he briefly regained consciousness and identified himself as Owolabi, but they were yet to get his address.

From December 2014, the media has been awash with stories of corpses being abandoned on major highways and neighbourhoods within the Lagos metropolis.

With varied causes of death ranging from hit-and-run incidents, to rituals and assassinations, hardly a day or week goes by without 'Lagosians' being confronted with the offensive sights.

Though the corpses are later removed, they are, however, often left for so long that they begin to fester, releasing

putrid smell into the atmosphere.

Such was the pitiful case of a day-old baby who was abandoned by his allegedly mentally-unstable mother at Abule Egba.

The new born, wrapped in a black sack and covered with a plaster on the mouth, died after being abandoned by the roadside.

The baby was dumped in the area on January 28 and when people in the area saw the baby, they allegedly left him there for six hours until he died.

A trader, Mrs Atanda Kuforiji, said they were taken aback by the sight of the abandoned baby. She added that a resident of the area drew the attention of other residents to the presence of the baby dumped by the roadside.

She explained that everybody went to the scene to see why the residents were shouting, only to be confronted by the sight of the abandoned new born.

According to her, "The baby was wrapped in a sack and placed by the roadside. I saw a crowd gather and decided to have a look; the child was still alive.

"People took pictures of the baby. His mouth was covered with a plaster to prevent him from crying out. People were giving all sorts of analysis, but nobody offered to help the baby."

It was learnt that many of the dwellers in the area were too scared to pick the baby from where he was dumped.

Inside Lagos also gathered that some residents tried to call the police and other health officials while the baby struggled to live but eventually died after six hours and was left there till 5pm before he was finally removed.

The various incidents have brought to the fore again, questions of what agency is responsible for ridding Lagos State of unwanted corpses.

According to their website, the Lagos State Environmental Health Monitoring Unit (SEHMU) was launched on August 21, 2000 to rid the streets of Lagos of corpses and other related health hazards.

Giving reasons for its existence, the agency on its website stated that, "the issue of corpses and dead animals on our roads and highways inherited from the immediate past administration constituted an irritating, embarrassing and environmentally unpleasant sight, not to mention its public health implications.

"Though removal of corpses from the highways is the statutory responsibility of the local government councils, neglect of this activity by the LGAs occasioned an executive mandate to be given by the State Governor to the Ministry of Health to take over the duty of ridding our highways and roads of corpses."

So far, the agency said it had maintained its duty of ensuring that Lagos State was free from abandoned corpses.

The agency stated that so far, it had removed 2,188 corpses: 1,318 males and 870 females.

However, for a big city like Lagos where crime, hit-and-run cases occur on a daily basis, many concerned residents are calling out to SEHMU to increase its awareness and step up its duties.

Many concerned 'Lagosians' are asking for a more efficient arrangement that would keep such unsavoury sights away and accord the dead, no matter the circumstance of their demise, some respect.

According to Moses Balogun, a resident of Brown Street, Oshodi, the frequent sighting of human corpses on Lagos highways reminded him of those days, about 12 to 13 years ago when life in Lagos was so uncertain.

"Those were the years 'Lagosians' confronted the military and many people paid with their lives. It was common then to see bodies lying in different parts of the city. The political environment has changed, but shockingly, the gory sight of bodies on the highways has returned," he said.

Even as some wonder at how many such bodies are found on the roads, others worry that the premium the Lagos society puts on human life and dignity may have become very low in view of the abandonment of such bodies, sometimes for days.

In the past few weeks, the number of bodies abandoned on various highways within the state has been on the increase.

Perhaps they were victims of hit-and-run drivers or thieves who received jungle justice in the hands of irate mobs. The corpses are of old, ailing people; those with unbalanced minds and possible victims of ritual killings or commuter bus robbers.

The bodies in diverse stages of decomposition have been reasons for bitter complaints by 'Lagosians'.

Lamenting the frequent sight of corpses on the highway within Lagos, a trader at Oshodi Market, Abbas Morakinyo, said no less than four bodies had been found and removed at Oshodi in the past three weeks.

"The body will suddenly appear beside the road in the morning with nobody to explain how it got there. The shocking thing is that some of these corpses are not fresh, indicating that they were brought to Oshodi from a different place entirely.

"For instance, a male corpse in an advanced state of decomposition, two weeks ago, suddenly appeared at Oshodi-Oke. It lay there for two days before it was removed.

Another trader, Oby Chilaka, said that yet another body of a male was found lying on the Oshodi flyover.

"Nobody was able to explain how he died or how the body got there," he said.

Another route where bodies are commonly seen is the Ikorodu highway, where residents and workers say it is becoming worrisome.

A banker, Rasheed Adeoke, suggested more security surveillance to unravel the indiscriminate dumping of bodies on the highways, particularly at night.

"It seems that whenever a general election is approaching, the rate of ritual killings and kidnapping increases.

"Perhaps that is one of the factors responsible for the present increase in the numbers of corpses found along the highways."

A civil servant, Yemisi Olugbogi, said bodies found on the highway might be people who chose to cross busy highways

rather than use the pedestrian bridges.

“Many of the bodies I had seen are those knocked down by a vehicle. Their relatives may not know their whereabouts. ‘Lagosians’ are even skeptical to offer help under such circumstances.”

Even ‘Lagosians’ living on the coastline have expressed concern over the increase in the number of bodies that are washed ashore.

A resident of Oko-Baba, Ebute-Metta, Adeyemi Sola, said that some of the corpses might be victims of ritual killing.

“The psychological impact of such unpleasant sight is not good.”

An octogenarian, Pa Adigun Okeowo, lamented that Lagos was fast becoming a haven for gangsters where different groups foment terror.

He also blamed security agents for not investigating some of the bodies found on the highways.

“In our days, if a corpse is found, an investigation will try to unravel the circumstance surrounding the death.

“But today, nobody cares. Rather, the body is removed and given mass burial. There is no value or respect for the dead any longer,” he said.

According to an official of SEHMU who craved anonymity, SEHMU could not be everywhere at the same time.

“Lagosians should endeavour to inform the ministry on time about any corpse found in any part of the state.

“They can be assured that within the next 12 hours after information might have reached us, something would be done”.

However, singing SEHMU’s praise, Funmi Oyefeso, a retired railway worker residing at Papa Ajao said, “I want to commend SEHMU for the work it is doing. Compared to some years ago, there has been a tremendous improvement.

“What is important now is communication and constant patrol of the highways by officials of SEHMU daily to discover dead bodies.”

Oyefeso also wanted the Ministry to carry the local councils along in this responsibility, as the councils are closer to the people.

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