

Enforced Disappearance: Where is Joseph Kpoobari Saue, 28?

Stories by Styvn Obodoekwe

To the family members of Kpoobari Saue of Bodo in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Wednesday, April 18, 2012 may have come and gone, but the footprint it created in their family may remain indelible for a much longer time. On that fateful day, Joseph, 28 a member of the family, was seized by policemen at the CPS, Port Harcourt when he willingly went to honour a Police invitation.

Joseph, a staff of a hotel located at the old Port Harcourt township was said to have been invited, along with the manager of the hotel, by the policemen following the arrest of one of their clients for an armed robbery incident committed in Akwa Ibom State. Information available to this publication indicates that the suspected armed robber who allegedly snatched a vehicle at gun point at Uyo was trailed to the hotel where he was said to have lodged for several days after the robbery. The suspect simply identified as Musa and some of his gang members, comprising of five girls and six boys, were arrested and taken to Akwa Ibom.

The hotel was searched for their weapons, but nothing was found according to Anthony, brother to Joseph. Also arrested with him, were some staff of the hotel. A message was dropped for the manager and Joseph to report at the police station for investigation as they were not at the hotel when the Policemen stormed the hotel.

Without anticipating any danger, Joseph and his boss went to the Police station. But unknown to him, he had already been penciled down as a principal suspect in the crime. He was consequently arrested and detained at the CPS police cell, while his manager and others being held were granted bail. The manager attempted to secure Joseph's bail, but the move was rebuffed by the policemen.

On the following day, he was handed over to Policemen from Uyo who took him to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, SARS section of the Akwa Ibom Police Command for detention.

When news of the arrest of Joseph filtered into the ears of the family, the search for him began. Immediately, his family members went to the CPS, only to be told that he has been handed over to Policemen from Uyo. Efforts to know the officers he was handed over to failed as there was no readily available record of the transfer.

However, armed with the information that he has been taken to Uyo, Joseph's younger and only brother, Anthony Baridoma Saue, 23 on April 19, 2012, went to Uyo in search of his elder brother. He was able to trace Joseph to the SARS section of the Police Command popularly called 'Ikot Akpanabia' by locals, a deadly detention centre according to sources from Uyo.

"At the detention, I saw some persons who asked me what I had come there to do. One of them told me that I resemble one boy called Joseph who was inside the cell. When I told them that Joseph is my elder brother, they told me that he was inside the cell. When I asked them why he was being held, they introduced themselves as armed robbers who carried out the operation for which Joseph was arrested", Anthony disclosed.

According to him, the

suspected robbers further told him that Joseph was accused of running errands for them when they were in the hotel where he was working. He was also accused of being in possession of their weapons. "While I was still talking with them, food was brought for the robbery suspects and they called me to come and eat with them, but I declined," Anthony disclosed.

Anthony said that the Policemen he first approached promised to take him to his brother in the cell. However, when another officer accosted him and demanded to know who he was and what his mission was, he introduced himself and told them he was at the station to see his brother who, was in their custody.

"We later consulted a lawyer who, after collecting about N100,000, could not do anything to rescue my brother from the Policemen. The lawyer told us she went to Uyo but was not allowed to see Joseph", Anthony disclosed.

"Immediately I mentioned that, he pounced on me, beating me mercilessly. Other Policemen joined in beating me up", Anthony disclosed. After

the beating, he was detained for about two hours before being released and ordered out of the station. He went back to Port Harcourt that day without being allowed to see his brother.

But in spite of the beatings he received from the Ikot Akpanabia officers and some threats never to near the station again, Anthony went back to the Police station a few days later in search of his brother.

He was greatly shocked and dumbfounded when the Policemen denied vehemently, ever entertaining such a matter involving his brother, or ever being in custody of Joseph. Checks in the record books of the policemen could not disclose any trace of Joseph's name. Confused, he contacted a lawyer who hinted that Joseph may have been taken to prison. Immediately, he went to a prison in Uyo in search of his brother, but there was no trace of his brother. The prison officials also contacted other prison formations in the state but Joseph could not be traced.

Fearing that his brother may have become a victim of enforced disappearance, Anthony took the matter to a



Joseph Kpoobari Saue

Forum Identifies Unemployment As Obstacle To Peace

Members of Kpor Community in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State have identified youth unemployment as a major obstacle to peace in Ogoniland and other parts of the Niger Delta.

Speaking during a town hall meeting organized in the community on Monday, July 23 by a non-governmental organization, CEHRD in collaboration with Search for Common Ground, SFCG, participants at the forum noted that since Shell's pollution started devastating the Niger Delta environment, people's means of survival have been destroyed, thereby rendering community members who depend on the environment for survival idle. This, according to them, has resulted to accumulated anger, which often manifest in form of conflicts and violent crimes.

Charging NGOs and CSOs interested in peace in the region

to mount pressure on governments at all levels to tackle the problem of unemployment, they noted that it would be easier to achieve peace in the region if the people, especially the youths are meaningfully engaged. They commended SFCG, CEHRD and their sponsors, the EU commission for their interest in peace in their community, noting that the activities of the groups in the community have contributed immensely in restoring peace in the community which was once engulfed by violence.

In her address, the field officer for SCGF in Rivers State Elizabeth Nwibie disclosed that the interest of the organization she represents is for sustainable peace to prevail in the Niger Delta.

"We want to see how we can use conflict transformation techniques to build peace in this area. The project started in March and has been progressing. The

people have shown excitement", Elizabeth stated, adding that she believes "communities need capacity building to be able to attend to their issues and bring solutions to them." The communities are also being trained to take ownership of the peace projects.

Giving an overview of the 'Tomorrow Is a New Day Project', Michael Gbarabe, project officer of CEHRD stated that since January 2012, CEHRD and Search for Common Ground started the project of intervention on the conflicts in the Niger Delta sponsored by the EU Commission.

"About 180 people of Kpor have so far been trained on conflict transformation in the course of the implementation. They were equipped with techniques to be able to identify and contain early warning conflict signals," Gbarabe explained, disclosing that more training programmes would be

cell where my brother was being held. He wanted to take me in, but one of their officers came and he saluted him and told him that I am the brother of one of the thieves that were transferred to this place.

The man barked at him, 'who told you that a case like was transferred here?' he asked and who am I and what am I finding there. I told him who I am and that I am from Rivers State. He told me to go back, that there was no such matter there. That I should go to other places and search for my brother, that there is no such person there. I turned back to go and at the gate, the person who directed me to the SARS asked me what happened and I told him. He followed me back to the place and they spoke in their Akwa Ibom language, after which the man at the gate open the gate and ask me to go in. As I entered, I thought they wanted to show me to my brother, but they started slapping me and beating. They told me to sit down.

There were some people there also, five girls and about six boys inside the room. As I sat there, a guy tapped me and asked me what I was finding there. I said I am looking for my brother and I don't know what I did that they had to bring me here. He looked at my face and said I look like Joe. I told him he is my brother, the person I am looking for where is he, he said he was locked inside. I asked him who he was, he said that all of them were transferred to that place last night. He pointed at one man and said he is the person that stole the car; the Musa who stole the car. When I asked the Musa what happened, he said he won't tell me anything that there were police informants there. He barking at me and told me to get out. I left but he later called back. They later brought food and he told me to come and eat, but I said no.

The Policemen later brought me out, beat me again, gave me my clothes and told me to go and never to come back there to look for my brother. I was at the Police station at some minutes after 2pm; I was released about 3 30pm. After about one week, we sent another person, my elder sister's husband, Naabula Christopher, to the Police station but they denied not having my brother there. They said that that they did not handle any case like that. He requested for their records and they showed him some files; and he was not there.

carried out in future to equip the community on advocacy techniques.

Earlier in a welcome address, David Vareba, project officer of CEHRD noted that the forum was aimed at bringing community members together to brainstorm on challenges, difficulties and successes of the project.

The forum also deliberated on a solidarity event scheduled for September ending. In the solidarity event, which is part of the activities of the 'Tomorrow Is A New Day Project', the community will chose a project that would bring many people together. The project is aimed at bridging the gaps and cracks created by conflicts in the area, Gbarabe and Vareba explained.

A side event at the forum which was attended by chiefs, elders, women and youths of the community, was a dance by a group of young girls from the community.