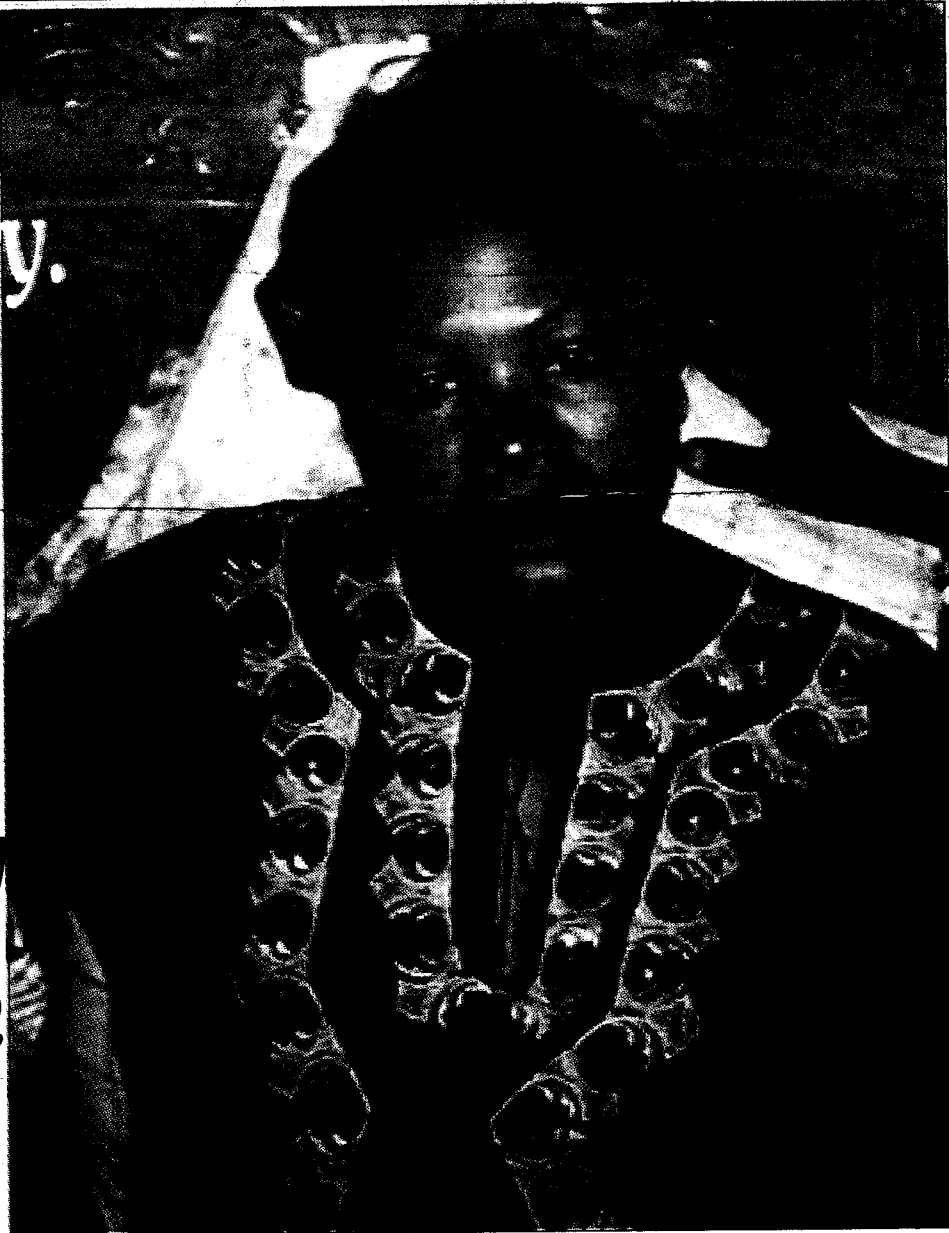


**Around 4 am, I tried his number repeatedly. Somebody picked it and told me I should not worry; that when they finished with my husband he would be allowed to go home**



Even as she sat, looking at nothing in particular, it was obvious that she was heavily pregnant. And all that seemed to be running in her mind was the wish that her husband had never shown the least interest in politics.

Tambawa, the pregnant widow of Mr. Jesse Arukwu, who was assassinated two weeks earlier, was perhaps causing the day her husband told her that he was venturing into politics.

Not that this was his first. After all, he had served as the chairman of his local government. But this time, his political enemies felt his ambition to rule the entire state was vaulting and he had to be stopped.

And so, in the early hours of Sunday, Arukwu's body was discovered in a ditch a few kilometers from his home. His neck was almost cut into two. In his house, located along the Rukuba-Gada Biu road, the anger of the mourners was palpable.

As a rising star, Jesse was very much admired by his Irigwe people, who saw him as a Messiah. The story of how he died is as bizarre as why he had to die. When our correspondent spoke to his widow, two weeks after his death, she was still at a loss as to how some people could so cruelly and brutally kill her husband without any clue as to their motive.

If she was disturbed at the stark reality that her three children would never see their father again, the prospect that she would have to bear the burden of explaining to the unborn baby what had happened to its father was even more heartbreaking. She told her story to The Punch.

According to her, Jesse came back home at about 6 pm on a Friday with some friends after attending a rally held by his party, the Advanced Congress of Democrats, in his local government area. She said that after a few minutes, he told her that he was feeling feverish and needed to buy some drugs. And so off he went with his friends that had accompanied him home.

Tambawa said that she felt tired after her dinner and slept off. At about 1.30 am, she woke up and looked around but did not see her husband. She picked up her phone and called him. To her relief, he answered and told her that he was neck deep in a discussion with some people, whom he did not disclose. He assured her that he was in safe hands and would join her as soon as he was through with them. "I was still not satisfied with his explanation

#### **Jude Owuamanam**

and I had to call him again at about 2 am, but he still gave me the same answer, assuring me that he would be home soon," she said.

But Tambawa said that she was still restless and from that moment kept vigil for her husband's return and possible embrace and kiss that never were.

She continued her story: "Around 2.30 am, I called him again and said, darling why are you still outside at this time of the day? We were speaking in Hausa. He assured me that all was well and that he would join me as soon the meeting was over. At about 3 am, he called me and assured me that all was well and that he would soon come back home. At this time, I heard the barking of dogs at the background and I asked him whether the meeting was taking place in somebody's house. He kept telling me not to worry; that he would explain everything to me when he came back.

"Around 4 am, I called his number again, but this time, it rang repeatedly without any answer. At another point, it was giving me 'user busy' meaning that the phone was being used by somebody. I called repeatedly and this time, the number just refused to go. I continued to try and suddenly somebody picked the phone, this time, not my husband. I told the person, 'Please I am his wife, can I speak to him?' The person told me not to worry; that if they finished dealing with my husband, he would be allowed to go home. I called again and this time, the person became annoyed and repeated the same message and hung up. By this time, day had broken"

Tambawa said that not knowing what to do, she decided to go to their village to inform his relations, but when she could not find any motorcycle operator, she decided to go and tell his younger brothers living within the Jos metropolis. She said that a search party was thereafter organised to look for him, and in the early hours of Sunday, some Fulani herdsman reported that they had seen a body dumped in a pitch somewhere near the barracks."

However other accounts gathered by our correspondent indicated that after buying the drugs, Jesse decided to cool off at a restaurant along Joseph Gornwalk Road. He was there with some friends when a call came to him, purportedly from his supporters in Bassa who said that they were stranded after the rally and needed his assis-

tance to get to their destination. He was said to have excused his friends and headed for the spot described to him, but he never returned.

Where he was when his widow was calling; what he was doing; who the people with him were and who answered the phone when his widow called all remain mysterious.

Some people were said to have been arrested and were telling the police what they knew about Jesse's murder.

But beyond that, residents of Jos and Bukuru metropolis are yet to come to terms with the spate of unresolved assassinations and attacks of innocent citizens. Prior to Jesse's murder, another ACD gubernatorial aspirant, Mr. Pam Dung Gyang narrowly escaped death in similar circumstances. He had just returned from a rally held by the party in Barkin Ladi, when some gunmen invaded his residence. He was however lucky to escape, but two people, one his aides and a senior police officer, were not so lucky. They were gunned down by the marauding gunmen.

Again, one I. G. Omu, said to be a younger brother of the former director general of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, near Jos, Maj. Gen Paul Omu, and one Alex Atighir were killed. Two days after Jesse's killing, a legal practitioner, Mr. Pedrals Osokpor, was also brutally murdered by men suspected to be armed robbers. There was also an attack on a cameraman with the Nigerian Television Authority and recently the brutal murder of a legal practitioner, Mr. Pedrals Osokpor right in the heart of the city centre.

Residents are worried about the escalation of crime since the assumption of the present leadership of the police in the state. They blame the rising crime wave on the inertia of the police to track down the marauders. Even the recent order banning motorcycle operators from operating beyond 8 pm seemed not to have had the desired effect.

The Police Commissioner, Mr. Richard Chime, was quick to exonerate his men from any laxity. In a chat with newsmen in his office, Chime said that he appreciated the concern of the citizens on the security situation and that the police authorities were on their guard to make the state safer.

He said that the police had put in place some strategies to ward off unwanted persons in the state, adding that such strategies had started paying off.