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Missing Edo commissioner found dead in hotel room

By Emmanuel Obe, Benin

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The body of the Edo State Commissioner for Information, Mr. Calus Enoma, was found in a hotel room in Benin on Monday, 24 hours after the state government declared him missing.



Mike Okiro

Police sources disclosed to our correspondent that Enoma's body was found naked in a room in Precious Palm Royale Hotel, opposite the University of Benin, Ugbowo.

But the Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Peter Ogboi, said the police would not make any statement until reports had been received from the detectives and other experts sent to examine the body and the scene.

He, however, said the police had informed the state government about the incident.

The Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Mr. Daniel Aigbavboa, confirmed the death of the commissioner.

The Governor, Prof. Oserheimen Osunbor, visited the hotel in company with the Assistant Inspector-General of Police in charge of Zone 5, Mr. Udom Ekpoudom; the Commissioner, Edo State Police Command, Mr. Chris Dega; and members of the State Executive Council. Journalists were barred from entering.

The Edo State Government has, however, formally announced the death.

A statement on Monday by the Secretary to the State Government, Dr. Joseph Akhigbe, said Enoma was on Monday morning found dead in a hotel room in the state capital.

It added, "The death of the information commissioner is shocking, sad and painful, and a great loss to the government and people of Edo State.

"The governor is saddened and depressed by the unfortunate loss. The security agencies have commenced investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death."

Reacting to the incident, the proprietor of the hotel, Mr. Jude Nosagie, said he was shocked at the news.

"Today is one of the saddest days of my life. I am shocked that this is happening not just in my hotel but also because of the calibre of the person involved," he said.

Nosagie explained that the staff of the hotel probably did not find out early that the commissioner had died in the room because he might have left an instruction that he did not want to be disturbed.

He said, "So, that was why I think nobody was able to envisage any problem. I understand that he came here and checked in by himself on Friday, and that was it. This hotel is secure because you cannot go into any room without the permission of the receptionist.

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"We have been operating this hotel since 1999, we are hoping that the police will get to the root of this matter. This is a sad day for me and I commiserate with his wife and other members of his family. It is very unfortunate."

Ekpoudum, said, "From what we have seen so far, he checked in on Friday and was never seen again. But this morning, his room was broken into and he was found dead."

"We are here with police pathologist and fingerprint experts to make sure that we get to the root of the matter."

"I assure you that whoever did this, no matter where the person may be, must be fished out. Our men are already working everywhere and we must get those who did this dastardly act."

In his own reaction the Speaker of the state House of Assembly, Mr. Zakawanu Garuba, said, "It is a very unfortunate incident. We are yet to be briefed about the details of his death. However, at the sitting of the House this morning, we resolved that the police should look for him, provide security for public officers in the state and whosoever is involved should be investigated and prosecuted."

The state government had on Sunday accused the Action Congress governorship candidate in the state, Mr. Adams Oshiomhole, and the party of being responsible for the "sudden disappearance of Enoma." The commissioner was said to have left home on Friday night after receiving a telephone call.

The Special Adviser to the Governor on Communication and Public Relations, Mr. Tony Ikpasaja, had given Oshiomhole and the AC 48 hours to produce the late commissioner "in good health or face dire consequences."

Reacting, the Edo State Publicity Secretary of the AC, Mr. Reti Uzzi, had said that the disappearance of the commissioner was news to the party, and hoped that the government was not just making up excuses to attack law-abiding AC members.

"They should look at their intra-party problem, which is more vicious than the inter-party rivalry. The AC is made up of great minds that would not descend to that level. We believe in the judiciary and the rule of law," he said.

Oshiomhole had dismissed the charges as "shameful and crazy." He said the government was trying to divert attention from its imminent defeat at the Court of Appeal.

He had said that rather than turn its searchlight on the AC and other imaginary opponents, the Osunbor administration should "look at the PDP, which he said harboured hardened people who could kidnap people."

Oshiomhole had wondered why the government did not go to the police first to report the matter before jumping to conclusions.

In a three-page reaction to the allegations raised by the government, the AC criticised the claims of the Edo government, saying it was using the allegations as an excuse to "unleash a chain of terrorist attacks on earmarked members and leaders of the AC, particularly Oshiomhole."

The Chairman of the party, Mr. Tony Omoaghe, who addressed journalists on the matter on Monday, said the party had instructed its lawyers to institute a libel action against Ikpasaja and Osunbor for damages.

Enoma had been in the news of recent, projecting the Edo State Government's rejection of the election tribunal's nullification of Osunbor's election. He was initially reported to have been kidnapped in the premises of a hotel in Benin on Friday.

A lawyer, Enoma was once the Legal Adviser to Bendel Breweries Nigeria Limited and a former Assistant State Legal Adviser to the PDP before his appointment.

He is survived by a wife and a child.

Meanwhile, the AC in Edo State has expressed shock at the news of the death of Enoma.

Omoaghe said on Monday that the party was certain that the police had the capacity to get to the root of the matter.

The Benin branch of the Nigerian Bar Association also expressed grief at the loss.

A statement by the Chairman, Mr. Solomon Odiase, and the Secretary, Mr. Jonathan Aiwerua, said anybody with useful information on the incident should forward it to the police and the NBA.

Aiwerua said the association was too shocked to make any statement.

However, the National Conscience Party has criticised Ikpasaja for his utterances while the commissioner was missing.

The National Chairman of the party, Dr. Osagie Obayuwana, said Ikpasaja should be punished for asking Oshiomhole and the AC to produce the late commissioner when the matter was yet to be reported to the police.

“Spokespersons for government ought to know that what they say is capable of inflaming passions and they ought to exercise great caution in making public pronouncements,” a statement by Obayuwana said.

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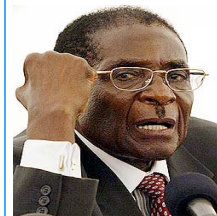
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