

# God will judge killers of my son, says father of boy chased into the lagoon by police

The integrity of the Nigeria Police Force is being called to question again after the tragic death of a 24-year-old man last Sunday in Lagos is linked to activities of policemen, writes TUNDE BUSARI

**T**HE last prayer point of Tunde Adedeji a few hours before he died centred on evangelism, his family and underprivileged people. He was so passionate about these issues that his elder brother, Ayodele Adedeji, who was with him during the prayer session, could not contain his joy. Tunde would later be drowned with his dreams in the lagoon at the Wole Olateju Crescent in the highbrow Lekki Phase One, in Lagos on that same day, July 13, 2008.

The circumstances in which the 24-year-old met his untimely death will remain a burden on the integrity of the Nigeria Police Force, unless the six mobile policemen who invaded the arena, a few metres to the lagoon, where Tunde and his friends in the neighbourhood were playing football, are fished out to face justice.

Tunde and his friends have always taken advantage of Sunday as a work-free day to test their football skills at a yet-to-be-developed portion of land on the beach. But the six messengers of death in mobile policemen spoilt their fun that day when they jumped onto the pitch, firing shots into the air, causing the players to run for dear lives. Tunde found the lagoon a safer route, dived into it even when he was not a good swimmer. The policemen were alleged to have fired more shots into the water and ensured that Tunde got drowned before they returned to their bus.

This was the story as told by Tunde's friends and sympathisers, who thronged Vaults and Garden, a private cemetery at Ikoyi, on Thursday to bid Tunde farewell in his journey to eternity, a journey he did not plan for. Only a few ones were able to control their emotion, as the coffin bearing Tunde's remains was being lowered into the grave some minutes before noon.

"As far as I'm concerned, those policemen killed Tunde in the usual way they have been doing. We are holding no one responsible but the police, and I know they will not rest for putting his parents and family in this sorrow," one of the sympathisers, who gave his name as Kenneth, told *SUNDAY PUNCH* soon after the burial.

Ayodele, however, maintained a calm posture, attributing the death of his only brother to the will of God. He said, "I know Tunde is not dead, but sleeping. I thank God for his life because he was a wonderful person and my best friend. I know God has a purpose for taking him away from us this time."

The bereaved father, Prince Adelowo Adedeji, who understandably wore a long face, borrowed some lines from Ayodele's submission. The 60-year-old father said he was devastated by the death because "he (Tunde) was very close to me. In fact, he was working under me."

When Tunde successfully completed his degree course in computer engineering at the University of Lagos last academic session, he sought a redeployment from Niger State where he was posted to by the National Youth Service Corps to serve in his father's company.

"He was still under me for his youth service when this happened. But I have handed whoever was responsible for his death to God," the father said.

This, however, did not make him to lose sight of what he went through at the Maroko Divisional Headquarters when Tunde's whereabouts initially threw his entire household into confusion that Sunday. He said, "I became jittery when it was 9 pm and he was not seen at home. I then went to the division. The policemen on duty said they could not do anything because it was not yet 24 hours."

The disturbed father managed to contain his emotion after the uninspiring response of the police to his distress. "His brother went to where some American musicians were holding a concert on Victoria Island. He searched everywhere, but he could not find him. He also went to the MTN office to confirm the calls he had made on that day. It was found out that his last call was in the morning before he went to the playing field," Pa Adedeji said.

For a son who rarely kept away from home unannounced, his sudden disappearance became a source of worry. The father said, "I don't know how I was able to hold myself till the following morning when I quickly returned to the police station. To my surprise again, an inspector told me to wait for 24 hours before any search could be officially conducted."

The bubble, however, burst when he later learnt that somebody had already reported the police shooting at the lagoon in Lekki at the same station. "I think the person had watched how they were deceiving me before he told me that



•At his graveside. Inset: His father



•The lagoon where he died

the matter had been reported. That was how we got to the scene without any trace of him (Tunde)," Pa Adedeji added.

Fishermen, who were watching from a distance because of the fear of the shooting they experienced the previous day, were eventually contracted to search the water. The fact that they were aware of the escape effort of some boys into the lagoon helped them to easily fish out Tunde.

"Is it not a tragedy for me to pay for the recovery of the corpse of my son from the waters? I paid the fishermen and managed to look at it. This is a fate I never wished for. But what can I do? The damage has been done. Who am I going to hold now? That is why I said I leave it to God's judgement," said the mournful father.

It was gathered that none of Tunde's playmates, who were with him on the field when the incident happened, was able to report the incident at his residence. "They later said they were scared to come. I cannot blame them because I cannot just imagine how I would have reacted to such a person," Adedeji said.

One of the boys, who prayed for anonymity, told our correspondent that the arrival of the police at the field looked as if they were all out to kill them for a purpose not known to them.

Our findings have not shown any trace of the land being a subject of litigation between two parties, one of which might have used the police to scare away trespassers.

It is even more curious when the police at Maroko Division denied any knowledge of the aggressive policemen. The Police Public Relations Officer, Lagos State Command, Mr. Frank Mba, a Deputy Superintendent of Police, said, "There is evidence that the so-called policemen are not from Maroko Division. Otherwise, they would have since been identified."

Mba added that the Commissioner of Police was particularly

touched by the incident and was committed to ensuring that justice was done. "The command is assuring the bereaved family that nothing will be done in secrecy in our search for those men. If they are policemen, we have our own ways to get them, and we shall get them. Our heart goes to the family," he said.

Top officers of the police from the Force Headquarters, Abuja have also shown concern about the incident. Deputy Inspector General of Police (Operations), Adedayo Adeoye, and Assistant Inspector General of Police (General Police), Olusegun Efuntayo, were said to have paid a condolence visit to the Prince Adelowo Adedeji Street residence of the deceased's parents last week.

However, Mba has called on the public to refrain from what he described as hasty

conclusion in their comments on the incident. He said the public should have outgrown the era of calling dog a bad name in order to hang it. "The perpetrators of the act have not been found to be policemen. No trace of gunshot was found on the body of the deceased before it was buried, even though the result of the autopsy is not yet out. Why are people then jumping to conclusions? People should give us a chance to find those men."

To the father, the incident is like administering medicine to a dead person. "Bringing out whoever killed my son will not turn to my son," he said.

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