

INTERVIEW

'I want my son's corpse, it's one year

A year after Babatunde Akinwumi was tortured to death at Adeniji Adele Police Station in Lagos, his aged parents and bereaved wife are still awaiting his corpse. The deceased's father, Chief Mufutau Akinwumi, laments the death of his first born and the insensitivity of his killers in this interview with **AYODELE ALE**.

How does it feel to have your son lying in the morgue for more than one year now?

I feel very sad about the death of my son; especially because he died as a result of an issue he knew nothing about. A client for which his company was executing a contract caused the problem. Eight days after it was discovered that some items were stolen from the client's company at Ajah, his company invited him. On getting there, they asked him to enter a car without telling him where they were going. He was eventually taken to Ajah Police Station where he was detained. It was later that day that I received a call from the station that he was being detained.

Why would the police question him about an issue he did not know about?

My son was an electrician and he was the one that was specifically assigned by his boss to handle the contract. Anytime there was any electrical problem, he was the one that handled it. He had been doing so for more than one year before the incident occurred.

What happened at the police station?

They tortured him. I learnt that it was when he started crying and asking what he did wrong that the police told him that he was the one that hired some members of the Oodua Peoples' Congress to steal some items from the company. The police told him that the company was burgled and properties worth about N12 million were stolen. He told them that he was not a security man and that the people that should be quizzed were the security guards. But they would not



•Akinwumi. Inset: Tunde

listen to him. In the night of the same day, he was taken to Ishaga in handcuffs.

Was he brought to your house?

He was taken to another house he was using. The place was ransacked but nothing incriminating was found.

What was the relationship between your son and the members of Oodua People's Congress?

The owner of the company, known as Lara, had

asked my son to help her to look for some OPC members who would be working as security guards for the company. My son succeeded in linking her up with two members of the OPC that he knew. I was not aware of the development until later. But what I was made to understand was that three months after the OPC boys started working for her, she sacked one of them and left the other one known simply as Adeyemo, who was the one that remained there until October 2008 when the incident occurred.

Maybe they suspected that your son connived with the thieves...

He couldn't have done that. He was a very nice boy. He was a focused child who knew what he was doing. He was not a thief. He was working as a supervisor with Stallion Estates, a company in Abuja, before he was invited to Lagos by his former boss, an engineer who established his own company. He did not place my son on any salary scale. I learnt that they agreed on profit sharing. Their office is situated at Opebi in Ikeja, Lagos.

What happened later?

He was initially charged to court, but he was released for want of evidence. But on the day he was released, the policemen from Adeniji Adele re-arrested him alongside others and they were taken to Federal SARS, Adeniji Adele where they were detained till he died from torture.

When last did you see him before he died?

I saw him on October 3, 2008. That was the seventh day after he was arrested. But before then, his wife, in company with some others, were going there to give him food. When I got there on that day, I asked for the IPO (Investigating Police Officer) and I begged him to

Tunde's death in police custody was avoidable

Kunle Fadipe, counsel to the family of the late Babatunde Akinwumi, told **AYODELE ALE** that the victim would not have died if the police had acceded to the passionate plea of the victim's father that his son be released.

What do you think was responsible for Tunde's death in police custody?

The IPO was alleged to have kicked him and he fell down from the staircase. He believed that Tunde was all the while pretending. In fact, the CP reprimanded his men in my presence, that they didn't bring the fact of his ill health to his attention. Although he was sick, the IPO gave him no respite. We learnt that he continued to kick him and forced him to stand when his energy could not sustain

him. Did that not amount to torture?

When and how were you informed about his death?

Tunde died in the early hours of a Saturday, although the police claimed that he died in the hospital when they rushed him there early in the morning of that day. The dad was with me till 9 pm on the Friday preceding his death. The father was in agony as he continued to tell me that I should please ensure that he was released on bail that night. He had just returned from Adeniji Adele in company with one of my colleagues in chambers where they had gone to intensify efforts for Tunde's release on bail. He told me that he was not happy with the condition of his son at the time he left Adeniji Adele. He said that his child might not last till the following morning unless urgent medical attention was given. That was why he

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since police tortured him to death'

help me so that I could take him home for treatment because his condition was critical.

What condition?

He told me that he was having serious pains in his stomach. He said that while beating him the previous night, the police kicked him in the stomach several times. I asked why they tortured only him out of the five of them that were arrested in connection with the incident, and he said he was the only one taken out of the cell at midnight. The other boys that were locked up with him also confirmed that he was brought out of the cell in the night and that he was holding his stomach and writhing in pains when he came back. I told the policeman in charge of the case what my son and his friends told me and he said that he (son) had already been taken to the hospital for treatment. He demanded for the money they used for the treatment and I gave it to him, just so that he would spare his life. Although I did not tell the lawyer about the money initially, he later learnt about it and became very angry. But I did not like the condition in which I met him. I was particularly worried when my son told me that they only took him to a nearby chemist where some drugs were bought for him.

How did you learn about his death?

The Commissioner of Police in charge of Adeniji Adele Federal SARS then, one Adediran, told Lawyer Fadipe on October 4, 2008 in my presence. The lawyer was really angry and was cursing the policemen that killed him. I broke down and started crying profusely, because if they had released him to me when I begged them to do so, he would not have died.

What has happened since then?

I think about him everyday. I am not happy at all. He left three children behind and I have been living on pension for more than six years. I retired from the Lagos State Civil Service. He was the one helping me and his mother, as well as the other siblings. He was the one that saved us from hunger. At times, I woke up without anything to eat, and he would be the one to come to my aid. That is the son that they have killed. My life has not been the same since he was killed.

How have you been coping?

I have been living at the mercy of people.

What were you doing before you retired?

I was working as an office attendant at the Cabinet office of the Lagos State Government.

Why didn't he complete his secondary

education?

I was the one who asked him to go and learn a trade because there was no money to send him to school. He decided to go into electrical repairs.

Are the police doing anything to pacify the family?

They never cared. They did not even sympathise with me and they said that my son died because he refused to eat in custody. But it is a lie, because on October 1, 2008, three days before he died, his wife still went there to give him the food she prepared and he ate it with his friends.

How do you see the attitude of the police to the death of your son?

I don't think they realised that they have done something bad. They feel that they have done what they like and nobody can do anything to them. For instance, since the inquest started, the commissioner has refused to come to court to testify. The police claimed that he had been transferred to another state. What we are trying to do now is to get the post mortem so that we can go and bury the corpse. The post mortem has been delayed because they said the doctor in charge, Dr Obafunwa, has been busy.

wanted me to prevail on the CP to release him that night for adequate medical attention. So, the following morning, at about 9, I called the CP to find out about Tunde's condition. It was then he told me that he had died. According to him, his health took a turn for the worse and he passed on.

Don't you think his death was avoidable?

I have a lot of friends in the police, so I will not want to talk carelessly. But again, one fundamental obligation I owe my friends is to tell them the truth even though it may be painful. The death of Babatunde Akinwunmi in police custody was completely avoidable if the police had done what they were supposed to do. Police should operate as a professional entity that is properly coordinated and not one acting at cross purposes.

What happened? Tunde Akinwunmi had been arrested more than thrice at various times by different police formations in connection with the same allegation by the same complainant, and had been released on bail after spending several days in custody. At no time did he jump bail in spite of the atrocious conditions under which he was held in custody. So, when again he was re-arrested by Federal SARS at Adeniji Adele, there was no basis to assume that he would run away since he never ran away between the first time he was arrested and the time he was re-arrested by policemen from Adeniji Adele. So, we expected that when we applied for his bail in the night preceding his death on the grounds that he was ill, he should have at least been released to us.

As a matter of fact, when he was arrested the second time, he had actually been charged to court and was always attending court sittings from home. I appealed to the Commissioner of Police in charge of Federal SARS to consider his deteriorating health and release him to his father on that ground. I told the CP that Tunde's father was a big traditional chief here in Lagos and could not run away from his domain.

Did the commissioner of police accede to your request?

The CP told me that he would not be released in spite of the critical nature of his health. He assured me he would be taken care of. In the middle of the night, his condition worsened and there was nobody to help him. All the men had gone to sleep. The inmates called for help, but there was nobody to readily attend to Tunde. I called the CP to find out about the state of Tunde's health early in the morning of Saturday because of his condition the previous night, and I was told that Tunde had passed on. The CP informed me that his men told him that Tunde fell sick overnight and was taken to St Nicholas Hospital where he died. If I did not call the CP, it was highly unlikely that the police would inform us. In any case, they didn't get in touch with the family. It was a market woman within the precincts of the police station that informed Tunde's wife who took food to him that her husband had died.

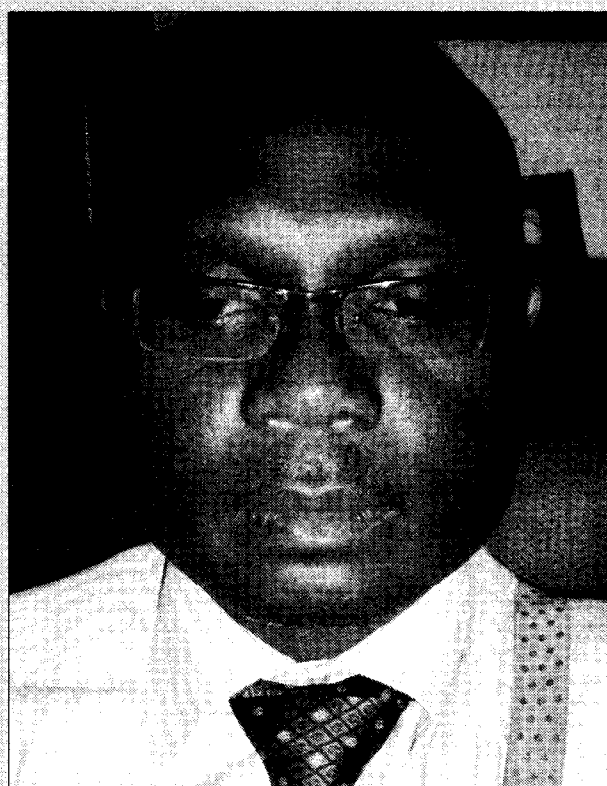
What was your immediate reaction?

I went to Adeniji Adele the following Monday after the event. I drove straight to Adeniji Adele and I met the CP who was visibly troubled. It was apparent that he didn't like what happened. He called the IPO in charge of the case and indicted him for not informing him about the state of Tunde's health. He told the IPO that he had warned them to give him a list of all those who were sick in the cell so that they could be released.

Apparently, he was misled by his IPO who must have told him that all was well with Tunde at the time we were complaining that Tunde was very sick. The IPO most likely told him that Tunde was pretending, and he relied on his judgment, forgetting that in most cases, IPOs are mischievous and vindictive. In essence, Tunde was a victim of the excesses and callousness of the IPOs, who are the albatross of the Nigerian Police Force and the brains behind the ugly image of the force.

So, you believe that the refusal of the police to release him led to his death?

My position is that if Tunde had been



•Fadipe

released to his father that night, he stood a chance of surviving, and he could have come back to face his trial or the allegation against him. So, what did the police achieve by his death? Absolutely nothing. Again, why must every

arrest be accompanied with detention? If a man had been arrested and detained for 15 days in the first instance, released and re-arrested and detained for another eight days after which he was charged to court, why would you want to detain the person again? Why would you have difficulty in releasing the person once again on bail since he has proved that he cannot run away. Were the people who arrested and released him not police officers too? Are they not trained to know when and when not to release?

To answer your question pointedly, the death of Akinwunmi is yet another sad commentary on the attitude of our policemen to their duty, the sanctity of life, the place of bail in the administration of criminal justice and their perception of a suspect.

I know nothing about his death –CP

On Thursday, the Commissioner of Police in charge Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad, Adeniji Adele, Mr Jubril Adeniji, told our correspondent that he was not the one in charge of the unit when Tunde died. "I came in in May, and I believe it will not be appropriate for me to comment on an issue that happened before I came here," he said.

He summoned one of the policemen handling the case on behalf of the station, who told him that the Federal SARS became involved in Tunde's case in response to the directive of the Inspector General of Police, following a petition forwarded to his office by the complainant

in the matter. According to the police officer, Tunde fell ill and was taken to the hospital for treatment before he died. "You have heard what happened. What else do you want me to say over a matter that did not happen under me," the police commissioner asked.



•Adeniji