

Disquiet over police officer murdered by policemen



A few weeks ago, a policeman, Boniface Ukwu, was murdered in cold blood by his colleagues. TOYOSI OGUNSEYE writes that civil rights groups allege that there is a deliberate attempt to sweep the matter under the carpet

BONIFACE Ukwu was killed gruesomely. His bullet-riddled body showed that the late police officer was allegedly shot so many times by eight other policemen before he finally gave up the ghost.

Ukwu, a native of Ogbodu-Aba in the Nsukka senatorial zone, Enugu State, attended a social meeting of the Knights of St. John at the residence of Albert Nnamani, the chairman of the Civil Service Commission who is also a member of the Knights association on the night of June 22, 2010.

The meeting ended around 9.30p.m and the late Ukwu, who was the officer in charge of fire arms at the State Criminal Investigations Department, Enugu, drove off in his old Suzuki Jeep to return to his house. He was stopped at a police checkpoint mounted by Independence Layout Station policemen. He identified himself as Assistant Superintendent of Police Boniface Ukwu, attached to the SCID and was allowed to pass.

He had not driven up to one pole when one of the policemen at the checkpoint shouted at him to stop and asked for a proof that he was a police officer.

In a petition written to the Governor of Enugu State, Mr. Sullivan Chime, and the former Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Ogbonnaya Onovo, by the Knights association, Ukwu reportedly stopped to answer the policemen. The petition read, "He stepped down from his vehicle to explain his identity further. The policeman that ordered him to stop then shot him on the leg. Ukwu was reported to have run into the bush, screaming for help. The policemen at the checkpoint reportedly rushed after him into the bush where he lay. They then used torch lights to confirm his identity as ASP Boniface Ukwu, in charge of D7 at the SCID."

"There were reports by passers-by that Ukwu was yelling on top of his voice that, 'I am ASP Boniface Ukwu. I work at SCID Enugu! Don't kill me!'"

It was learnt that the policemen then conferred among themselves when they realised the gravity of the act of one of them and decided to convey the wounded officer to their

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Divisional Police Officer, Mr. Wilson Akpan, a Chief Superintendent of Police. "They explained to him the circumstances under which Ukwu was shot and wounded. The DPO was said to have examined the wounded officer and confirmed his identity as Ukwu," the association said.

The petition read further, "Rather than save the life of the wounded officer and face the consequences of his men's indiscretion, Akpan directed his men to take the wounded officer away and finish him off, after which they were to claim that he was killed in a shoot-out with kidnappers."

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The DPO then allegedly ordered the corpse to be deposited in front of the Police Station by the side of the road around 2a.m.

The petition read further, "Akpan further directed the corpse of Ukwu to be deposited at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital mortuary, where he was labelled as an armed robber."

"At this stage, the news of the shooting of the late ASP had spread like wild fire. The SCID officials and SARS arrived at the police station to view the body of the deceased but were told that he had been deposited at the mortuary."

It was gathered that the wife of the late Ukwu, who is also an inspector of police, and his younger brother, a constable, have not been allowed to view the corpse of their husband and brother since he was slain. The police also claimed to have performed an autopsy without the knowledge of the deceased's relations.

The autopsy, which was signed by Dr. Ohayi Robsam reads, "Cause of death: circulatory collapse (shock) from multiple (penetrating) gunshot injuries. Right upper limb: there was a penetrating injury to the distal one-third of the upper arm, with a communicated fracture beneath. There was another penetrating injury in the lateral aspect of the shoulder."

Suspecting foul play and after the outcry that met Ukwu's murder, the Police state headquarters launched an investigation into the matter and concluded that, "The suspects have recklessly without due course and recourse to the use of their firearms killed the police officer. The available evidence in the case file indicted all the suspects in this dastardly act. In the light of the foregoing, the suspects should be tried departmentally and punished accordingly."

The findings of the police revealed that there was a case of kidnapping at No. 3, Nnobi Street, Independence Layout, Enugu, the day Ukwu was killed. The policemen actually stopped and searched some passers-by, including those with vehicles that attended the same meeting with the late ASP Ukwu.

The report reads, "All the 10 policemen went to the scene and made use of firearms without recourse to when to make use of firearms as contained in Force Order 237. The deceased was a senior police officer and incidentally, the O/C firearms at the SCID; but despite the fact that he was identified as a police officer, the Independent Layout Police still sent a signal to Compol 'B' Ops/A that Ukwu was an armed robber/kidnapper and deposited the

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"The suspects booked their arms and ammunition and expended the ammunition as follows:

- Inspector Donald Meke booked 30 rounds and expended 28 rounds
- Inspector Kurmi Tanko booked 60 rounds and expended 35 rounds
- Sergeant Kalu Uduma booked 60 rounds and expended 3 rounds
- Sgt. Matthew Omeleke booked 60 rounds and expended 15 rounds
- Corporal Alex Okolie booked 30 rounds and expended 1 round
- P.c. Henry Onunze booked 30 rounds and expended 5 rounds
- P.c. Bassey Bassey booked 30 rounds and expended 19 rounds
- P.c. Alu Nnabuchi booked 30 rounds and expended all

"The gun of the late ASP as claimed was not recovered after the exchange of firing. The distance from where the said complainants' vehicle was snatched is very far from the residence of the kidnapped victim. That the DPO did not only send signal tagging the late Supol was an armed robber, he equally went on air. That there was no bullet trace on the vehicle of the deceased."

The National Human Rights Practitioners Group and the Nsukka Professionals Association, Lagos, in another petition to the IG, argued that the police in Enugu should not be allowed to try the matter, "This is the highest form of bestiality and it is our demand that justice according to the law be allowed to take its full course. The position of the law in such a situation as this is obvious. The arrest, investigation and prosecution of all those involved in this evil, especially the DPO who ordered and also participated in the ritual of execution, are unavoidable and inevitable."

"Without prejudice to the competence of the Nigeria Police to investigate crimes generally, we are skeptical about the disposition of the Enugu Police Command to investigate this sordid murder satisfactorily. We are concerned because the suspected killers are fellow police officers; and the principal suspect, Wilson Akpan, is a very superior police officer. The danger that the investigating police officers may tend to protect or shield their fellow police suspects or sidetrack useful information cannot be ruled out."

"While junior policemen that acted on his orders are being charged to Orderly Room trials holding at the police barracks, with the view of dismissing them from the Police, Akpan still walks as a free man. It was learnt that Akpan had scores to settle with the deceased over the allocation of a residential quarters at the Area Command Police Barracks to Ukwu. Akpan reportedly insisted that the apartment be reserved for his girlfriend, who is also a police woman, and had threatened to deal with the late policeman."

The Police Public Relations Officer of the Enugu State Police Command, Mr. Ebere Amaraizu, said that it was not true that the police were shielding the suspects, "That cannot happen. I can tell you that the commissioner of police has launched an investigation into the matter. At the end of the day, the suspects will be prosecuted accordingly. We are talking about a very grave matter here; such cannot be swept under the carpet."