

... City, Crime, Courts

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Community ac of killing Benii

Temitayo Famutimi

Controversy has begun to trail the death of a 52-year-old Beninoise fisherman, Mr. Gbodjinou Christophe, who was allegedly battered to death by the operatives of the Lagos State Kick Against Indiscipline Brigade and the Environmental and Special Offences Enforcement Task Force.

The two agencies had invaded the Illubirin in Osborne Road, Lagos, on March 18 on the grounds that the inhabitants were illegally occupying a stretch of land in the area.

PUNCH Metro learnt that Christophe, a father of 11 children, was dispossessed of his 200,000 CFAs (N63,384) and N50,000 by the operatives who allegedly killed him when he resisted them.

It was learnt that the operatives later dumped his corpse beside the lagoon after the incident.

An eyewitness, Mrs. Maria Peter, said, "Some members of the team came in advance in mufti and joined the people who were

playing football beside the lagoon.

"I was smoking fish right beside the lagoon and all of a sudden we saw the combined team of the KAI brigades and some policemen running after us and shooting into the air.

"Children, women and men ran into the lagoon via canoes and boats to evade arrest but unfortunately for us, the team also came with speed boats.

"Christophe escaped in a canoe but was chased with a speed boat and caught. He resisted the team and guarded his money but he was brutalised and the money was stolen from him. The money was his thrift contribution, which he collected that day."

The community's head, Mr. Peter Simenu, corroborated Peter's claim and added that it was not the first time the place would be raided.

Simenu, who was among those arrested but was later released after three days, said, "We were actually given a notice to quit by the state government. But that does not mean that they should kill us.

"They brutalised

Christophe and damaged his scrotum. They burnt our properties. It's high time they stopped this brutality. Enough is enough."

The Secretary-General, Centre for Defence of Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, Prof. Maurice Fagnon, said the NGO had taken up the

issue to ensure that justice prevailed.

Fagnon said if the state government had acted on earlier petitions on the incessant invasion and harassment of the inhabitants by the task force, Christophe's death would have been avoided.

Fagnon said, "It is



2,500 displaced Euleni herdsmen

Accuses KAI, task force noise fisherman

saddening that these poor people have continued to be victims of repression. Why should they continue to kill people like fowls? We wrote the Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babatunde Fashola, on March 12, 2008, and October 20, 2010, on this same issue and we were given assurances that such

repression would stop."

In a purported reply to one of the correspondence, the state government through the Directorate for Citizens Rights, Ministry of Justice, Alausa, promised to help ameliorate the situation.

The letter dated April 3, 2008, and signed by Mrs. C. O. Ibiroga reads in part,

"We are totally unaware of the plight and brutality which the people of Illubirin village were being subjected to. We sympathise with their situation and we assure you that appropriate steps would be taken to assist in the amelioration of their situation."

On the latest development, the CDHRDA sent a petition to the state government titled "Invasion of Illubirin fishermen village and killing of a fisherman by the state task force." The April 4, 2012, petition, which was addressed to the governor, reads in part, "We condemn vehemently the killing of Christophe by the state task force comprising policemen and KAI officers who invaded the quarters and unleashed brutality,

inhuman and degrading treatment.

"In that note, we claim a damage of N1bn as compensation to the dwellers for their lost properties and death of Christophe.

"We call on the state government to act promptly to stop the task force from brutalising citizens."

Christophe's elder brother, Amtoene, described his death as sheer injustice.

"If my brother had done something wrong, he should have been arrested and charged to court to face trial rather than them killing him," he said.

However, the task force has denied carrying out the raid. Its Public Relations Officer, Mrs. Adetayo Asagba, described the

allegation as false and baseless.

She said, "On that day, we were busy with other operations elsewhere. For the avoidance of doubt, on March 17, we were at Walter Carrington on Victoria Island. On March 18, we had another operation in Amusement Park in Apapa.

"In fact, all these operations were well reported in the media. Our operational records are there to show it. It is not this task force, maybe it was another agency."

But, the KAI Marshal General, Capt. Danjuma Maigari (retd.), said his men carried out the raid in collaboration with the task force.

Maigari said, "The KAI brigade carried out the

raid with the backup of policemen attached to the task force.

"In all the raids we have carried out there, including the one you referred to, nobody was killed. I am shocked to hear this.

"I am even surprised that they are just coming out at this time since the incident happened in March. I think they are just formulating the story to draw sympathy so that they can remain in the community."

Maigari said the raid was justified because the inhabitants were security threat to residents of the estates in the area.

He accused the fishermen of harbouring hoodlums who terrorised the community.

Maigari said that the government would soon start a project in the community, adding that their continued stay in the area was illegal.

