

Policemen pushed

Simon Utebor

Tragedy struck at Iba New Town in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos last Saturday when policemen allegedly pushed a man to death from a moving vehicle for refusing to give them N5,000 bribe.

The victim, Mr. Sunday Okoli, a 27-year-old motorcycle dealer at Ebute Meta area of the state, resided at 27, Alimi Ayina Street, off Chemist Bus Stop in Iba New Town before he died.

PUNCH Metro gathered that Okoli, who was riding an unregistered motorcycle, was stopped by a team of five policemen on his way from a filling station with his brother-in-law, Obinna.

The policemen were said to have asked Okoli why his motorcycle was not registered and demanded his identity card.

An eyewitness, who craved anonymity, said to satisfy the policemen's curiosity, Okoli dipped his hands into his pouch and brought his identity

card to convince them that he was a motorcycle dealer.

He said, "Okoli told the policemen that he was a dealer and that the motorcycle had not been numbered because he intended to sell it later.

"When they asked him for proof of his dealership, he dipped his hand in his pocket and brought out his ID card. Still, the policemen were not satisfied and decided to arrest him and impound his motorcycle."

The witness said one of the policemen rode the motorcycle towards their station at Ishasi while Okoli was bundled into the back of their pick-up van.

He said that was what he saw last until news filtered through that Okoli had been killed.

Wife of the deceased, Biele, who spoke with *PUNCH Metro* on Tuesday, insisted her husband was killed by the policemen because he allegedly refused to give them the N5,000 bribe they demanded from him.

She said before the policemen took him away,

her brother, Obinna, who accompanied the deceased to the filling station, had telephoned to inform her that the police had arrested Okoli.

She said by the time she got to the scene, her husband was allegedly begging the policemen that he did not have the N5,000 they demanded.

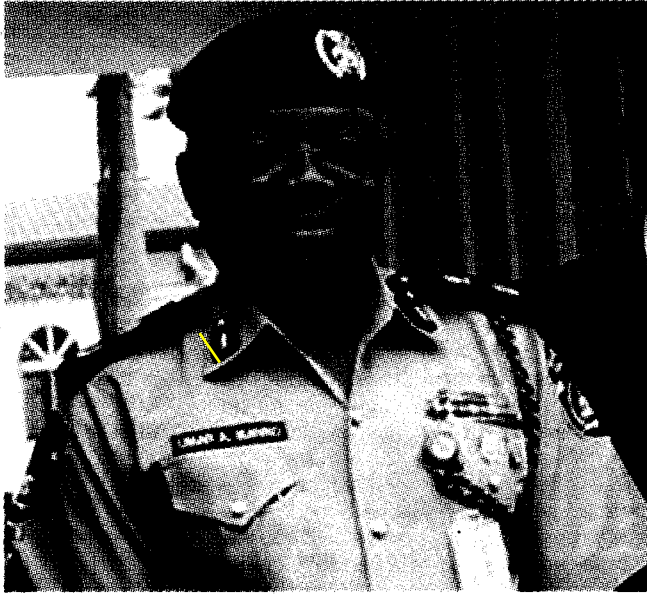
Biele said when Okoli saw that the countenance of the policemen had changed, he offered them N1,000 but they refused and instead pushed him into the back of their vehicle.

Biele said she asked her husband to allow them to carry the bike and that they would go to the station later to claim it but her husband said he would go with them since he had not done anything wrong.

She said thereafter the policemen took Okoli in their pick-up van and drove off.

Biele said, "As soon as they drove off, I went to a tricycle park to hire one to take me to the station. I thought it was at Iba Police Station. When I got to the station, I was told

my husband to death – Wife



•Lagos CP, Umar Manko

he was not there. I became worried and decided to call my husband.

"After several times, he eventually picked my calls and told me that they (policemen) annoyingly pushed him down from the vehicle because he could not offer them the N5,000 bribe they demanded.

He said when he fell from the vehicle he hit his head against the edge of the gutter near Mobil Filling Station.

"In the course of talking with him, the air time on my phone finished. I rushed to buy a recharge card and called his line again. But this time, his line rang out. I now started searching for him and

eventually found him lying beside the road opposite the filling station on Iba-Ishasi Road.

"With the help of people, we took him to a hospital on LASU-Isheri Road. On getting there, the doctor referred us to Igando General Hospital where he was confirmed dead."

She said youths of the area were quickly alerted and they trooped out, protesting the dastardly act.

It was learnt that the youth took Okoli's corpse to Ishasi Police Station where they were dispersed by policemen who shot sporadically into the air.

Biele called on the relevant authorities not to allow her husband to die in vain by bringing the policemen to justice.

But the spokesperson for the Lagos State Police Command, Ms. Ngozi Braide, told *PUNCH Metro* on the phone on Tuesday that the police were not responsible for Okoli's death.

Braide confirmed that the deceased was stopped by a

team of policemen, who had gone on a raid of Indian hemp spot, for riding a motorcycle without number plate.

She said the Divisional Police Officer of Ishasi Police Station said when the man was brought unconscious to his office by area boys, there was nothing to suggest he was pushed from a moving vehicle, as alleged.

Braide said the DPO informed her that some neighbours had confided in him that the deceased was discharged from hospital for heart-related diseases three days before he died.

The PPRO said, "They (policemen) arrested him and asked him to come and meet them in the office with the necessary documents of the motorcycle.

"One of them rode the motorcycle to the office. By the time they got to the station, within an hour or so, the DPO got a call that some area boys were threatening to come and burn down the station because the police pushed a man from their vehicle.

"The DPO now radioed the Control Room for reinforcement. They sent some policemen to the station and within few minutes, the area boys made good their threat and stormed the station in their large numbers claiming the police pushed the man from the vehicle.

"The man's wife said her husband called her to tell her he was pushed from the vehicle. But the DPO said when the man was brought by area boys to his office unconscious, they looked at his body and there was nothing to show he was pushed from the vehicle.

"The DPO said he did not know what happened to the man before he was brought to the station. Even the hoodlums arrested from the Indian hemp joint were in the vehicle and they said there was nothing like that."

However, the PPRO said the five policemen on patrol that day had been handed over to the State Criminal Investigation Department, Yaba on Wednesday.