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Fleeing graduate hawker drowns during NSCDC raid

AUGUST 28, 2014 BY SAMSON FOLARIN ■ 11 COMMENTS

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A 37-year-old graduate of Accountancy, University of Lagos, who sold recharge cards under the Meckwen Bridge, Victoria Island, Lagos State, has been chased to his death by men of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps.

Babalola Felix fell into the Lagoon as he was running to avoid being arrested by the NSCDC officials. The incident happened last week Monday afternoon.

Our correspondent gathered that the NSCDC men had invaded the area to rid it of hoodlums.

Confusion had resulted as people in the area fled in different directions on sighting the security operatives.

PUNCH Metro learnt that Babalola, who was also running, fell into the water after he slipped.

Eyewitnesses said efforts to rescue him were resisted by the NSCDC officials, who threatened to kill anyone who ventured near the scene.

The victim was said to have drowned after one of the officials pointed a gun at him to prevent him from coming out.

When our correspondent visited the area on Wednesday, he saw an eyewitness, who said she did not make statements at the police station because she feared she would be detained.

Despite entreaties by relatives of the deceased to make her change her stance, she declined, saying the police were arresting people who witnessed the incident.

But she agreed to speak with our correspondent on the condition of anonymity.

She said, "I sell herbs and on that day, I was around and saw everything.

"Around 1pm, NSCDC men drove into this place. The brother (Babalola) ran like others through a side of the bridge, but he slipped and fell into the Lagoon.

"Iya Peter (a trader in the area) started shouting, 'this person no sabi swim o, make una come help am o' (this man cannot swim, please help him).

"One of the officials replied, 'e no sabi swim, na hin e enter water, if he wan die, make hin die there' (he cannot swim yet he jumped into the water, if he wants to die, let him die).

"The brother begged them to rescue him, but they mocked and left him.

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"A dumb man working with LAWMA, also wanted to help him, but they beat him up.

"The brother made attempt to come out, but one of the NSCDC officials went to the place and pointed a gun at him that if he came out of the water, he would shoot and kill him."

PUNCH Metro spoke with the dumb man who attempted saving the victim.

Although he could not verbalise his expression, he gesticulated to our correspondent how he was manhandled when he appealed to the NSCDC men to allow him save the victim.

Our correspondent learnt that Babalola's remains floated on the water two days after the incident.

It was also gathered that policemen from the Zone 2 Police Headquarters, Onikan, arrested the NSCDC officials, but later released them.

The official who led the three-man team was identified as Inspector Oladele Orijah.

The younger sister of the deceased, Ajoke, said she had sold recharge cards under the bridge before she gained admission into the Kwara State College of Health Technology.

She said, "I was contacted on the telephone by some traders around the place who said I should come down.

"They did not want to break the news to me initially until I pressed them to talk.

"The NSCDC men prevented my brother from getting help. It was a tragedy that could have been avoided."

PUNCH Metro learnt that the deceased's aged mother passed out after hearing that her son was dead.

She was said to be in a hospital in the state.

Our correspondent learnt that Babalola had planned to foot his mother's eye surgery before his life was cut short.

The victim's widow, Oluwaremilekun, said, "My husband suffered till death. He struggled to send himself to school. He finished and couldn't secure a job. His uncle assisted him with funds to start the recharge cards business. But they have killed him.

"I am now a widow. He is irreplaceable. He married me properly; did court wedding, traditional wedding and church wedding. What will happen now? I am a widow for life."

Lagos-based human rights lawyer, Femi Falana, told our correspondent in his Ikeja office that justice must be given to the Felix family.

Falana said, "This is a case that should not be handled carelessly. The system reduced a graduate of the University of Lagos to a vendor selling recharge cards in town.

"In an attempt to chase him from the street, he was chased into the Lagoon by a law enforcement officer who was supposed to protect his life.

"To allow him to get drowned is worse. Those who tried to save him were scared away by the same official. It is a tragedy that should attract severe punishment under the law.

"We have taken over the matter and we will sue the appropriate agencies of government to make sure the family is compensated. He has left a wife and two kids. We will not allow them to become beggars on the street of Lagos. We will invoke the criminal jurisdiction of the state to get the officer fished out with a view to getting him to face the full wrath of the law."

The Public Relations Officer of the NSCDC, Lagos Command, Mr. Chibuzor Mefor, said he was not aware of the incident.

He said, "They have not transferred such a case here, so I am not aware of it."

The Deputy Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Lelma Kolle, said, "A group of NSCDC men, led by one A.C. Orijah attached to Alausa, Ikeja, raided Meckwen. For fear of being arrested, one of those in the place, Babalola, jumped into the water and died.

"The police at Zone 2, arrested the three NSCDC officials and queried them and they said nothing happened.

"But later, the Marine Police heard somebody drowned in the place and they recovered his corpse. They wrote the NSCDC that the officials should be released to them for questioning. But up till now, NSCDC have yet to reply the letter."



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