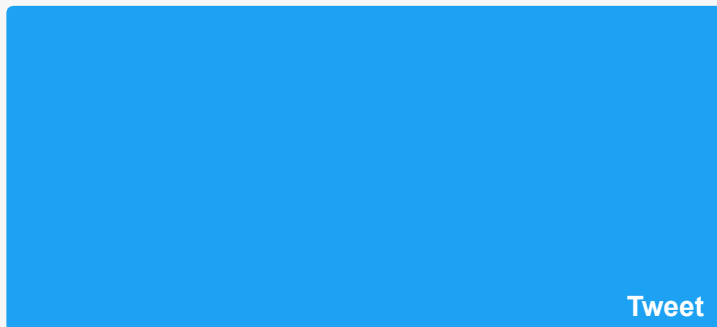


UNIBEN student, pastor detained after church member's death ...I won't talk to PUNCH– Edo PPRO

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Photos: Facebook, file

Rickson

Afeez Hanafi

Some students of the University of Benin, Edo State, have taken to the social media to protest against the detention of a 300-level Pharmacy student of the institution, Esegine Rickson.

Rickson is being detained at the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department along with a pastor, a bus driver, and two other persons because of the death of a church member.

The UNIBEN students accused the police of unlawfully detaining their fellow student and others without any proof to show that the suspects were complicit in the death.

They added that the detention had prevented Rickson from sitting for the ongoing exams in the school.

PUNCH Metro learnt that the detainees and the unidentified church member had attended a retreat at a parish of the Redeemed Christian Church of God on Sapele Road, Benin City.

As they were returning from the service on a bus last Sunday, they reportedly encountered a truck on top speed.

It was gathered that the bus driver zigzagged to avert a collision with the truck.

In the ensuing confusion, a phone was said to have fallen from the unnamed church member, who was also said to have attended the retreat.

“Uche picked up the mobile phone, and tried to return it to the presumed owner, a fellow church member and passenger in the vehicle. He, however, noticed bloodstains on the phone.

“He realised that the passenger was bleeding from the mouth and head and immediately informed the driver. The bleeding passenger was rushed to the Central Hospital, Benin City, as it was the closest. But they were immediately redirected to the University of Benin Teaching Hospital without being attended to.

“At the UBTH, the injured passenger was immediately admitted and placed on oxygen as he had already gone into a critical stage. However, all efforts to save him proved abortive; he eventually

died. All the while, his parents had been in the UBTH to witness efforts to revive their son,” one of the students, Ezekiel Efeobhokhan, wrote on *Facebook*.

Efeobhokhan stated that the family of the deceased reported the death at the BDPA Police Station the following day and the police invited Rickson, the bus driver, the pastor, a church elder and a church member to the station.

“But they were all unjustly detained without any warrant of arrest or evidence of murder. Uche (Rickson) has been there since Monday July 3, 2017. He has been ‘imprisoned’ without any evidence of murder or warrant of arrest. Bail applications have been refused. No autopsy or anything has been carried out. This is unjust and inhuman. Uche is a student and his exams began July 10, 2017,” he added.

The students had initiated a *#FreeUche* campaign following the failure of the police to come out with the autopsy report.

The Dean of Students’ Affairs, UNIBEN, Prof. Benson Osadolor, said the school authorities had weighed in on the matter to secure the release of Rickson on bail.

He said, “The school has intervened in the incident, but unfortunately, it was an incident that happened outside the campus. The police are handling the case as a murder case and the Chief Security Officer of the university and other officials have become involved.

“Everybody is trying to work within the limit of the law. More importantly for us is that the exams had commenced and we thought by now the student would have been released. But the police said they were waiting for the autopsy report. Whether it is out now, I am not sure. They said the autopsy report would determine the next step to take.”

Osadolor stated that the school had also sent its lawyer to the police for bail, but the police refused, adding that he had yet to get the full detail of the incident.

“I asked the students who came to complain how it happened, they had no idea. The only person that can give accurate information is our student who was in that vehicle or those with him, including the driver and the pastor,” he added.

When asked about the outcome of the autopsy, the Edo State Police Public Relations Officer, Moses Nkombe, declined comments, saying he would never speak to *The PUNCH*.

He said, “I don’t have anything to talk with *PUNCH* Newspaper please. As long as I remain the PRO of the Edo State Police Command, I will not talk to *PUNCH*.”

He cut off when our correspondent demanded reason for his stance.

When our correspondent called him back on Saturday, he said he was driving and promised to call back. He, however, did not.

Another call was put across to his line on Sunday, but he cut off the call immediately our correspondent introduced himself.