

My sister was shot dead by soldiers – Traditional ruler

Following the detachment of soldiers from the Nigerian Army to Afaraukwu, the country home of the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra, Nnamdi Kanu, traditional ruler and residents shared their ordeals with OGBONAYA IKOKWU

Can you briefly introduce yourself?

My name is Chimechefulam Odoemelum. I am the traditional prime minister of Egwu Afara Ukwu in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State.

What happened on Thursday?

What took place on Thursday, when the soldiers invaded our village, is better imagined than experienced. At about 4:30pm, we were in our house when we started hearing gunshots. We heard bullets landing on our roofs. When the shooting stopped – and having learnt that the soldiers had left – we ran for our dear lives. The whole village was deserted.

What did you do?

On Friday morning, I came back to assess the situation. Because we thought that they might come again in the night, we decided not to sleep in our houses. So, when we returned this morning, I saw my sister lying in a pool of blood.

Is she a member of the Indigenous People of Biafra?

She was not a member of IPOB. She was an innocent citizen of Nigeria. It is unfortunate that she lost her life in this crisis. I think we are in a democracy where every citizen has the right of expression, association and movement. So, I don't know why ours should be different. IPOB members here do not carry arms; they go about their activities peacefully. I wonder why the military would open fire on innocent civilians going about their normal activities. I don't know whether the government wants to wipe us out. How can we be treated this way when we don't have militants and Boko Haram members in our area?

What do you plan to do?

It is appalling. I'm a victim of what I don't know. I won't

fight the government. I have reported the killing to the police and we have buried my sister on Friday. Our minds are no longer at rest. Soldiers have been intimidating and harassing my people since last week. Those who are brave enough to stay in their houses are living in fear. They cannot even go out. We are peace-loving people because of our village's closeness to the Abia Government House.

The Army said the deployment of the soldiers in the village was done to maintain law and order. Do you think their reason is justified?

This is the hometown of Kanu and we have never had any issue that led to a breakdown of law and order. Kanu can't run away from his father's house. He is neither a criminal nor a militant. I don't see any reason why he should not be allowed to stay in his community. The only thing the government has against him is that he is the mouthpiece of our people. That is the only crime he has committed. He has a matter in the court with the Federal Government and he is on bail. If he has violated his bail conditions, why can't the Federal Government wait for court to make a pronouncement?



•Odoemelum

He is in his fathers' house. They should allow him and his community to be. We are living in fear and constantly wondering why the military should invade our community with armoured personnel carriers. Many of my people, including children, are currently taking shelter inside the bush. Our pupils can't go to schools, while shops around here have all been closed. We are pleading with the Federal Government to tell the army to leave our land immediately. The official residence of an assistant inspector general of police is close to our town, while the commissioner of police also resides few metres away from us. So, if there is any problem, the police can handle it. Let the 'python' go into the bush and dance; we don't want to see them (soldiers) where people are living. What business do human beings have with pythons? How can pythons be dancing for us?

How have the residents of this community been surviving since the incident?

We now open our doors only to the people we know. We buy household items by knocking on the doors of people that can recognise our voices – that is how we have been surviving since last Sunday.

The government should listen to the people calling for restructuring. Many people have been calling for the 1963 constitution and the implementation of the 2014 National Conference's recommendations. The government should negotiate with people. They should gather groups from all the geo-political zones to decide the way forward. What we are experiencing today is happening in other countries. The Federal Government should handle the Biafran agitation diplomatically and not with force. The government should wait for the court to decide Kanu's case. Re-arresting Kanu will not solve the problem. It will worsen the situation. It is the court that has the jurisdiction to say Kanu breached his bail conditions and not the Federal Government telling the court what to do – that is an aberration. The government should let sleeping dogs lie. Re-arresting him will worsen the problem on the ground.

'Buhari treating us as if we're not Nigerians'

Can you introduce yourself?



such an act could raise their blood pressure.

What do you want the government to do?