

Prisoners of Delta

Afeez Hanafi

AN awaiting trial inmate at the Ogwashi Uku Prison in Delta State, Smart Ohuzu, has died four months after he was remanded at the facility for attempted murder.

It was gathered that Ohuzu had been down with unnamed ailments for about two months while pleas from his co-inmates that he should be taken to a hospital for treatment reportedly fell on deaf ears.

PUNCH Metro learnt that Ohuzu collapsed on Sunday, but instead of rushing him to a hospital, some warders on duty asked his co-inmates to contribute N5,000 to fuel the operational vehicle that would take him to the Ogwashi Uku General Hospital.

Our correspondent was told that when Ohuzu was eventually taken to the hospital, doctors on duty referred him to the Okwe General Hospital or the Federal Medical Centre, Asaba.

It was learnt that the warders, however, brought him back to the prison, where

he later died.

An activist and former inmate at the prison, Gwamnishu Harrison, who posted Ohuzu's death on *Facebook*, accused the prison authorities of subjecting inmates to cruel treatment.

He said many inmates had lost their lives due to lack of welfare and negligence of warders at the prison.

Harrison wrote, "Yesterday (Sunday), another one happened. This is the worst. This time, it was a young man who was just remanded in the prison by a Delta State Magistrate's Court.

"For two months, he has been sick. Fellow inmates had begged the prison authorities to take Smart Ohuzu to a hospital.

"Smart Ohuzu collapsed and prison authorities called on the cell leader to gather N5,000 from inmates so that they could transport him to the Ogwashi Uku General Hospital. The poor prisoners contributed money. Some contributed N10, some N50 and they were able to contribute N3,500.

"Prison officers got angry and refused to take Smart

contribute N5,000 for sick inmate prison

• Activist blames prisons service for death

Ohuzu to hospital. Inmates who saw Smart Ohuzu on the floor struggling, rushed back to the cell and one inmate gave out the N1,500 balance

to enable officers to take Smart Ohuzu to hospital.

"Smart Ohuzu was rushed to the general hospital after warders had collected the

money contributed. On getting to the hospital, the doctors treated him and referred him to the Federal Medical Center or Okwe

General Hospital.

"The officers, instead of taking Smart Ohuzu to either of the hospitals that the doctors referred the inmate to, they, with chains on his legs, led him into the Black Maria and took him back to the prison, complaining of shortage of manpower.

"Smart Ohuzu was then chained and left in the cold. He struggled and died with tears in his eyes. He died three hours after he was forcefully brought back into the prison. The inmates cannot complain; if they do, they either change their cell or punish them."

Speaking with our correspondent on the telephone on Tuesday, Harrison, who is the Chief Executive Officer, Behind Bars Intervention, said one of the inmates, Onos Osagie, was accused of giving him the information.

He stated that Osagie was being tortured, calling on the Controller General of the Nigerian Prisons Service, Ja'afaru Ahmed, and Minister of Interior, Lt. Gen. Abdulrahman Dambazau (retd.), to intervene to avert further deaths in the prison.

Harrison said he paid for utilities ranging from water, electricity to medical treatment, among others, during his four years in the prison.

Harrison explained that he was discharged from the prison in November 2015, after a robbery charge against him was struck out for lack of evidence.

He said, "The minister of interior and CG Prisons should make available to the general public the names of all awaiting trial inmates that died in custody from 2013 till date – they are close to 10,000 – or we will be forced to publish their names.

"They should urgently set up toilet facilities for inmates to reduce infections as 150 inmates use just two toilets.

"Are prisoners supposed to pay for water, electricity, hospital medication, repair of damage vehicles and transport to court? If no, please start fighting corrupt practices from Delta State Prison Command."

Harrison told *PUNCH Metro* that he took pictures of some malnourished and sick inmates in one of his visits to the prison after his

release, adding that two of the inmates – David Okafor and Peter Onyeama – later died in December 2016 from kidney failure and swollen testicles.

"I brought their plight to the attention of the CG and the minister after I visited the prison in November 2016 and they were taken to the FMC, Asaba. Okafor died at the hospital, while Onyeama died in the prison after he was brought back from the hospital.

"The CG visited the prison today (Tuesday) and I learnt that cell leaders have been warned not to reveal whatever happens in the prison again," he added.

The Controller of Prisons in the state, Sam Iyakoregha, denied that Ohuzu died as result of negligence. He also refuted the allegation of poor welfare for the inmates at the prisons in the state.

He said, "He (Ohuzu) was treated six times in the prison's clinic. He was an awaiting trial inmate who came in as a murderer. He came with a wound. He was treated in the clinic and it got healed.

"I did not know what led to his death but he was being



• Okafor, Onyeama

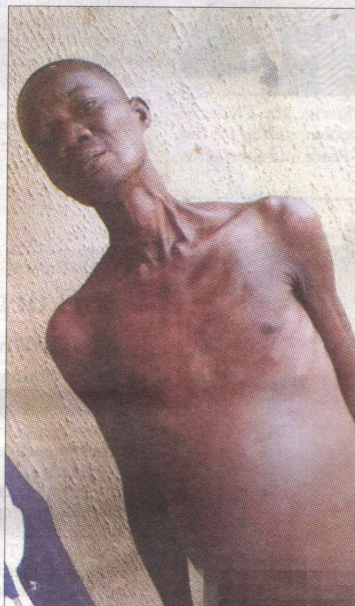


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