

# Widow tackles gas company over husband's death

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A widow, Tawakalitu Owolabi, says since the death of her husband, Lateef Owolabi, a gas company he worked for in the Abule-Egba area of Lagos State, Just Gas, has refused to compensate the family.

Tawakalitu explained that her 52-year-old husband had been asked to take some gas cylinders to Ilorin, Kwara State, sometime in November 2016, and was involved in an accident on the way, which claimed his life.

She said more than a year after the accident, the company had been silent on the family's welfare.

Tawakalitu, who claimed to have been married to Lateef for about 20 years, said, "We live on Sotunde Street, Abule-Egba, which is a stone's throw to the company's office. My husband was introduced to the company by a friend and the management promised to employ him after buying a new truck. He worked for them at different times and they paid him per task. Although the payments were not encouraging, he decided to endure until his employment would be formalised.

"On the day of the incident, he had told me that he was going to Ilorin to deliver gas cylinders to some customers of the company. Around 12noon on Tuesday when I expected him to have reached his destination, I called his line, but I could not reach him."

She said after several failed attempts, she became worried and called the company's manager, who allayed her fear by blaming the network provider.

The 41-year-old mother of four said the following day, her husband's younger brother called and said her attention was needed in the village over the death of a relative.

"I told him that my husband had travelled and had not been reachable on his telephone line. He said it was my husband that asked me to come to the village.

"On Thursday, I decided to go to the village. On the way, I got another call that my husband was involved in an accident, but his condition was stable and he wanted to see me. When I got to Oyo, the family broke the news to me that he was dead," she added.

She said the company's manager promised to get back to her after she returned to Lagos, adding that two months later, she held a meeting with a representative of Just Gas, who also promised to get back to her.

Tawakalitu noted that she was disappointed that the company's Managing Director, Ajayi Mayowa, was not present at the meeting and did not call to commiserate with her on the death of her husband.

The widow said since then, she had yet to hear from the gas company.

"I have four children. One of them gained admission to a tertiary institution and I can't afford the fees. There is no family member that is ready to bear the burden. I have been calling the MD and he has refused to pick my calls," she added.

However, Mayowa said Lateef was not an employee of the company, adding that the firm was wrecked by the accident.

The company's MD added that he sold his property to settle a loan he took from a bank to buy the truck that was lost to the accident.

He said, "We have the capacity to take only two drivers. When the deceased kept coming to our office, we felt we should engage him whenever there was job overflow.

“We engaged him once in a while to supply goods around Lagos. He was not an employee. Whenever we gave him a job, we paid him instantly.

“On November 29, our driver fell ill and we needed to do a quick delivery in Ilorin. The manager called him and asked if he could go to Ilorin for supply. He said he could do it. He demanded N15,000 for the job. We agreed to pay him N12,000 in addition to money for feeding.”

Mayowa said the deceased never got to his destination, although a company worker that accompanied him on the trip escaped unscathed.

He explained that the company's truck, which cost N15m; and the goods, valued at N2.8m, were lost to the accident, adding that the firm spent N1.2m for the clearance of the wreckage and Lateef's burial.

“From the time of the accident on November 29 to late December 2016, when we cleared the wreckage, we lost N19m. The accident brought us to our knees. We used a bank loan to buy the truck.

“To save my business, I sold property in Mowe, Ogun State. We are saddened by the accident and in retrospect, we discovered it was avoidable.

“It was the first time that we would experience such a disaster in our company. The company driver had been driving that truck since 2014, six times in a week, without any crash,” he added.

He said the company, on compassionate grounds, had started taking steps to pay the family compensation when it discovered that the deceased had two wives.

He added that there were also relatives seeking to make money from the tragedy.

Mayowa promised that by mid January 2018, the company would compensate the family.