

Police to probe death of six-month-old baby in Abuja school

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Michelle Onoja

Oluwatobi Akindele

The Nigeria Police Force, on Thursday, expressed its readiness to probe the alleged plot by one of its men, identified simply as Arome, to cover up the death of a six-month-old baby girl, Michelle Onoja.

The mother of the baby, Rebecca Onoja, had reported the Britmax International School, Lokogoma, Abuja, at the Divisional Police Station, Apo, for alleged negligence leading to the death of Michelle.

She alleged that the Investigating Police Officer, Arome, was attempting to sweep the case under the carpet.

Rebecca claimed that the policeman urged her to forget about the matter and forgive the school.

The matter became public knowledge when a lawyer, Ocholi Okutepa, made a *Facebook* post that Rebecca had dropped her daughter at the day care facility of the school on January 11, 2019, hale

and hearty, but she was called by the secretary later in the day to come over to the school.

He said, “The mother received a call at 2.19pm from the school secretary to come to the school. She immediately went to the school, which is less than a minute’s drive from her house. When she got there, she saw about five women praying over Michelle and asked what the matter was, but nobody answered her.

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“When Michelle’s mother carried her, she noticed blood stains on her nose and food particles on her hair and nostrils.

“At the point of entering the car to take Michelle to hospital, one of the persons around, who she later got to know was the school accountant, made a remark that was it not the hospital they had just returned from. She was shocked and asked him what he meant and he refused to speak further.

“On hearing this, it dawned on the mother that the school had earlier taken her daughter to hospital without her knowledge, yet none of the other people around could tell her anything. On getting to the Federal Medical Centre, Jabi, Abuja, Michelle was immediately received at the emergency unit and a doctor attended to her but to no avail. He remarked that the baby would have been saved if brought in earlier.”

Okutepe explained that the case was reported at the Divisional Police Station, Apo, adding that attempts get justice for the baby had proved abortive.

“Following the circumstances surrounding her daughter’s death, Rebecca lodged a complaint at the Divisional Police Station, Apo, and the IPO, Mr Arome, was detailed to investigate the matter. Based on the blood stains, the mother advised the police to demand the Closed Circuit Television footage to unravel the circumstances surrounding the mysterious death of her daughter and when Arome demanded the footage on January 12, 2019, he was told that it had been wiped off.

“Since the IPO could not access the CCTV footage, the parents decided that an autopsy should be conducted on Michelle to determine the true cause of her death. The IPO and the parents proceeded to the FMC, Jabi, and the parents paid N250,000 for the autopsy. Before the test result came out on

January 23, 2019, the parents were informed that some officials of the school had made attempts to compromise the result but they were resisted by the hospital.

“When the result was ready, it was confirmed that blood and food came out of Michelle’s mouth and nose. The result also indicated that baby Michelle died as a result of asphyxiation.

“Alarmed by this result, the parents demanded a full-scale investigation from the police with a view to bringing any culprit connected to the gruesome killing of Michelle to justice. Rather than commence a full and proper investigation into the matter, Arome suddenly lost interest and has since been pleading that we should forget about the matter.

“When the parents insisted on pursuing the matter to a logical conclusion, Arome started pretending to be busy and was not paying attention to the matter. The parents are seriously traumatised by the sudden turn of events in relation to the death of their daughter.”

The FCT Police Public Relations Officer, Anjuguri Manzah, confirmed the incident, adding that investigation was ongoing.

“Investigation is ongoing in the case, which means that nobody can cover it up; the case has been transferred to the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department,” he stated.

The Head, Complaints Response Unit, Nigeria Police Force, Abayomi Sogunle, said in order to establish a case of misconduct against the policeman, the parents would have to make a formal complaint against him.

“The parents can direct their complaints to our unit through any of our platforms and a tracking number will be sent to them, which will be used to follow up on the case,” he added.

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Attempts by *PUNCH Metro* to get the school’s side of the story were unsuccessful as one of the telephone numbers listed on its website rang out several times.

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