

SATURDAY STORY

# Our children were killed like rats before our eyes –Relatives of Rivers mass shooting victims

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Steven, Roland

*Few days after some gunmen invaded their community, bereaved residents of Mgbuodohia in Rumuolumeni under Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State told Chukwudi Akasike how their loved ones were killed by the assailants*

They killed my sons for nothing,” that was how Mr Martins Ikinga, a fisherman, who lost his son, Steven, and nephew, Temple Ikinga, to the bullets of yet-to-be identified gunmen in Mgbuodohia Rumuolumeni under Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, described the dastardly act. That fateful Saturday of April 6, 2019, the bandits, without any form of resistance, went from house to house, identifying and shooting their targets without caution.

Sounds of heavy shooting, according to residents of the area, rent the air for more than five hours with no security agent coming to their rescue. Even several calls to the nearby Azunmili Police Station did not make any difference as the gunmen, suspected to be members of a cult group, went

on a killing spree. By the time the shooting subsided, eight victims, all males, were lying lifeless on the ground, throwing the entire community into confusion.

Worst hit by the tragedy is 60-year-old Ikinga, whose house has since been deserted by his children and grandchildren after the mindless attack. Narrating how his son, Steven, was killed, Ikinga said, “I was lying down on the bed when he came back from work.

“He sat at the other side with his children and after we finished eating, we went in to sleep. I did not know when the gunmen entered. It was the voice of the mother that made me to wake up.

“The incident happened at about 10:00pm on Saturday. It did not take long when I heard loud sound of gunshots.

“I came out from the bedroom and went to the parlour; peeped from the window. I heard them ordering my son to come out. My son’s wife begged them, my son begged them but they never listened to any of them. They called each other by military positions like commander, officer.

“I will continue to say this; we don’t have security in this country. How can I can I lose two persons the same time?

“I say so because when people were calling Azunmili Police Station, there was no answer. We called one of my in-laws, who called the police station in Rukpokwu, which is far from this place, they came but it was too late because the gunmen had ended their operation and left.

“They killed my sons for nothing. They killed our children like rats before our eyes. The killers entered through the window. My son fabricated the burglar proof specially but forgot to lock it with padlock that day. He was killed in the bathroom.

“My son was not a cultist. The gunmen went after my son and his two cousins; they killed one of his cousins at the other building before they came for him and killed him. They actually wanted to finish my family.

“It is very painful to realise that I lost two persons in one day. They were buried the following morning (Sunday morning).

“My son has two children and his wife is pregnant. You can see that the entire community has been deserted. My son’s wife and my grandchildren have also run away. Nobody stays here in the night again,” he said.



***Ruth, Ikinga, Mrs Abraham, Ruka***

Another resident of the community a friend to the late Steven, Henry Akane, lamented that the men from Azunmili Police Station came in three hours after the incident. He said the community youths were shocked when the policemen said they wanted to come and take away the corpses. Akane said he received a call from his friend’s sister that the deceased’s cousin, who lived in the next building, was also shot dead by the hoodlums.

“I and Steven spoke that night but at a point, I couldn’t reach him on phone again.

“It was his sister that later called and told me that he had been shot by unknown gunmen. Ten minutes later, she called me to say that Temple Ikinga had also been shot.

“I could not hold myself again that night. The two deceased persons were not members of any cult group. They were peaceful people,” he said.

A youth in the community, who identified himself as Promise, said one of the policemen, who later showed up in the area slapped him three times for asking them why they refused to come and save the situation early enough despite several distress calls placed to them. The young man said the hoodlums were moving from house to house during the deadly operation.

Also speaking on the incident, another resident of the area, Alhaji Baba Ruka, said, “We also lost our brother, Kassim Babalawo, from Osogbo, Osun State.

“Kassim came out to take a bucket to take a bath and that was how he met some of the gunmen, who asked him what he was doing outside. They shot and killed him instantly.

“It was the second day, Sunday morning, that we noticed that the gunmen had killed many people. We (Kassim and I) are from the same place. He was an electrician; we buried him in Port Harcourt.

“That night, the gunmen moved from house to house and began to shoot. One person was showing them (gunmen) the people’s houses and they entered and began to kill them one by one.”

An aged woman, Mrs Nchelem Abraham, lamented that her only son, Roland, was snatched away from her by the gunmen. She maintained that her son was not a cult member and wondered how they would target him for death.

“He was my only son; I had 13 years of marriage without a child. He was 25 years and was working with Saipem.

“The gunmen gained entrance to his room after breaking the door with machete, iron rod and shovel. They saw him inside and began to call each other. They shot him in the presence of his wife and two children. His blood splashed everywhere in the room as he was shot in the head and stomach.

“When his wife began to cry, they told her not to worry and promised not to shoot her and the children. My son fell and died on his wife’s body after he was shot. They took away his big handset and money.

“The gunmen wore black robe. I cried all night till morning. It is a terrible loss for me,” she said.

Narrating how the gunmen killed her husband, Ruth, wife of the victim, disclosed that Roland had hid in the bathroom when the gunmen were coming and shooting at the same time.

“When we had the sound of gunshot, he thought it was the police. At a point, we noticed that people were running up and down.

“It was around some minutes to 11:00pm that the gunmen entered our place. Before they came, he had already entered the bathroom to hide.

“They (gunmen) asked me where my husband was, I told them he was not around. They then began to scatter the entire house; collected my phone and money.

“They flashed torchlight directly to my face so that I will not see their faces. One of them wore a mask.

“They searched everywhere; they did not know that he was in the toilet. It was one of them that opened the curtain and saw him.

“They shot my husband in the stomach. They told him not to worry and promised that they would not harm his children. They now shot him again in his chest and head. That was how he died. They warned me not to shout or that they would shoot me.

“They killed my husband for doing nothing to them. Now they have left me with a heavy burden to bear,” she said.

Reacting to the incident, Public Relations Officer of the Rivers State Police Command, Nnamdi Omoni, insisted that the incident was cult-related and added that the police had begun a thorough investigation into the attack. Omoni, however, described as false the claim that Azunmili Police Station did not respond to several calls from residents of the area during the attack.

“I hereby debunk the claim that the police did not respond to calls during the incident.

“I called the Divisional Police Officer in charge of the area and he responded. In fact, the DPO was on the ground and giving us report during the incident,” Omoni said.