

Rivers vigilantes killed my brother, turned his kids to orphans — Brother of slain truck driver

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•The late Eze

The killing of a 44-year-old truck driver and trained pipeline guard, Eze Wali, by a group of vigilantes in Rivers State recently led to a protest resulting in the blockade of a major road in the state for several hours. CHUKWUDI AKASIKE writes about the incident

Still disturbed about the circumstances leading to his brother's murder, Mr George Wali, a retiree of the power ministry appeared to have lost his strength while trying to narrate the incident that forced the blocking of the Igwuruta road in the Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State by some irate community youths.

His brother, Eze, who supplied sand to builders with his truck, was allegedly murdered on Monday June 24, 2019 by a group of overzealous vigilantes while on his way to harvest vegetable at a nearby farm to prepare soup for his twins.

Amid deep thoughts, Wali said he was yet to understand how a man could be shot several times based on allegation that he was a cultist, kidnapper or armed robber without verifying the claim. Eze was allegedly sprayed with bullets by the vigilante group at Omoluta in Igwuruta-Ali community.

Apart from supplying sand with his tipper, 44-year-old Eze was also a pipeline surveillance trainee waiting to be posted before he was allegedly killed by members of the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA Security Planning and Advisory Committee on Monday June 24, 2019. It was gathered that while the vigilante group was patrolling the area to arrest suspected cultists, the group met Eze and asked him who he was.

Eze was said to have told them that he was a surveillance trainee awaiting posting and also showed them his identification card. But they ordered him into one of their waiting vehicles.

Narrating the events that followed after Eze was ordered into the vehicle at gunpoint, Wali said trouble started when members of the vigilante group tried to tie his brother's hands to his back.

He said, "My brother asked them why they wanted to tie his hands, even when he had proved that he was not a criminal. They now inflicted machete cut wounds on his body before pushing him down from the vehicle. But one of the vigilantes said 'waste him'; that was when they turned back and shot him several times. After shooting him, they left and avoided driving through the road they come from.

"Before that time, the vigilante men had already arrested two young men. They later dropped them at Isiokpo and asked them to go for thanksgiving after giving them some money as transport fare.

"One of the boys arrested along the road and his girlfriend were going together before they apprehended him and left the lady behind. The girlfriend has made statement at the Igwuruta Police Station on what happened when his boyfriend was arrested. The boyfriend told the lady what happened when they released him. That is how I got the information.

"Before then, people called me to tell me that my brother's corpse was lying by the side of the road. When I got there, I saw his corpse. He was shot several times for no reason. How can they do this to an innocent person? The body is at the mortuary. The police have taken photographs of the body.

Wali lamented that members of the group killed his brother and labelled him a cultist, adding that the development made the community members to carry the corpse in his vehicle and blocked the Igwuruta road for several hours.

According to him, it took the intervention of the Divisional Police Officer of Igwuruta Police Station before the protesters dispersed.

A man from Igwuruta, identified only as Jude, described the deceased as humble, hard-working and easy-going.

SUNDAY PUNCH gathered that Eze lost his wife after he was delivered of a set of twins seven years ago. The deceased was said to have decided not to remarry until his kids were of age.

George said those involved in the killing of his brother must be brought to book.

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The OSPAC Commander, Goodluck Okoro, told a Port Harcourt-based radio station that Eze was killed while attempting to snatch gun from his men.

But another member of the community, related to the deceased, Sylvester Chikere, disagreed with Okoro, saying it was impossible for a man who showed his ID card and obeyed an order to get inside a vehicle to also try snatching a gun amid over 12 armed men.

Efforts to speak with Okoro were futile as he neither responded to the calls made to his mobile nor replied the text message sent as of the time of filing this report.

Dissatisfied with the action of the vigilante group, Governor Nyesom Wike said, "I am being careful about these local vigilantes because of what OSPAC is doing; they started taking the law into their hands by leaving Omoku and going to another local government area. We will not allow that. We are setting up Neighbourhood Watch. All those who want to work should come and work."

Speaking on the incident, the state Police Public Relations Officer, Nnamdi Omoni, told *SUNDAY PUNCH* that one of the OSPAC men, who allegedly killed Wali, had been arrested. Omoni explained that investigation was ongoing to unravel the circumstances that led to the killing of the father of two.

A lawyer, Ejemba Okeiru, called on security agents to ensure that Wali's killers were brought to book while relevant bodies like the Ministry of Women Affairs and non-governmental organisations should find means of taking care of the deceased's children.

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