

Police've 'detained' my 12-year-old son's corpse for 42 months – Distraught mother

Published December 8, 2019



Raphael Ede writes on how the police in Enugu State command has refused to release the corpse of a 12-year-old boy for 42 months because the parents could not pay N180,000 for autopsy

For 65-year-old Mrs Christiana Ukwa, going to the police to report the murder of her 12-year-old son, Oluebube Solomon, has been a regrettable decision she took.

Ukwa, a mother of six, who is a native of Ebiaji in the Ezza North Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, explained that the Enugu State Police Command seized the corpse of her son and refused to release the corpse of the boy to be buried 42 months after his gruesome murder. She said her agony was compounded because she could not pay N180,000 for an autopsy to be performed on the body in order to determine the actual cause of his death.

Narrating how life has been cruel to her family since her family relocated to the South-East from the northern part of the country because of the activities of Boko Haram.

The distraught mother of six came to PUNCH office in Enugu with her two daughters crying for help. She appealed to the police in the state, to release the body of her late child so that it could be buried.

Narrating the incident that led to the gruesome murder of her son, Mrs Ukwu who still look traumatised and could not recollect the sequence without the help of her daughters, said the unfortunate incident happened on Sunday, May 29, 2016.

She said, “On that Sunday, my entire family went for 5:30 am Mass at the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church at Independence Layout. I could not come home immediately with my children when the Mass was over. I was a churchwarden and because of that I had to stay back to ensure that things were arranged for the next church service.”

Her first daughter, Veronica, who witnessed the incident, went on as the mother broke down in tears. Veronica said, “When we got home, Oluebube went to our neighbour’s house to play with his school mate in-front of their house at No 14 Link Road, New Haven Enugu. As they were playing suddenly we heard gunshot from a compound at the Lobito Crescent and suddenly Oluebube fell down and was shouting ‘Jesus, my Chest.’ His colleagues ran to our house to tell us that they didn’t know what happened to Oluebube, that he was crying and holding his chest.

“My elder brother, Emmanuel, was around. He was playing also with his friends in the neighbourhood. So, he was called and he rushed Oluebube to Niger Foundation, where the doctors on duty confirmed him dead. The doctor told us that my brother was killed by a bullet and that the bullet hit him in the chest.

“Because our parents were not around, my brother brought the lifeless body of Oluebube to our house. He asked me to go to the police station to report the incident. He sent my younger sister to go and call my mother at the church while he returned to the compound where the bullet hit my brother to see if he could trace who fired the bullet and where the gunshot came from.”

Veronica explained further that before she could arrive with police investigators at the scene, her brother Emmanuel with his friends had discovered where the gunshot came from.

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“So I came with the police, Emmanuel narrated the incident to them and showed them his discovery.

“After examining the lifeless body of Oluebube, the policemen went to the scene where they traced the gunshot to another compound at St. Lito Crescent, where a window in one of the rooms upstairs was shattered with marks of bullet on the walls and other things in the compound.

“When they got to the compound that belongs to a well-known transporter, Edwin Oforma, she said there was absolute silence and the doors were locked. Having seen the windows that were shattered, believed to have been as a result of the gunshot, the police started knocking on all the doors. Suddenly the front door opened and they (police investigators) went inside and saw two children coming down from the staircase, a girl and a boy.

“The policemen asked the older one, a girl of about 14 years who gave her name as Chisom what happened. She led the police to a room where she told them the gun was fired, a double barrel gun lying on the floor.

“So, the policemen asked the girl who fired the gun and she told them that she was struggling to collect the gun from her younger brother, Nnanna who was about seven years old when it discharged accidentally. The police investigators took away the gun and went back to the station. Not quite long they returned and went back to the compound, this time they meet their mother. Upon enquiry, she told the police that she did not know what happened but all she knew was that their landlord asked her children to help him clean his room, Veronica narrated.

Sunday PUNCH however, gathered that the police investigators did not make any arrest that fateful Sunday. However, on May 30, being Monday, the policemen came back and arrested the seven-year-old Nnanna for killing Oluebube.

It was gathered that after the incident, the transporter who was around when the incident happened ran away with his two children. Because he could not be found, a police source said the little boy had

to be detained for four days at the New Haven Police Station.

Nnanna was said to have been released after the police had arrested the owner of the gun, identified as Oforma of Eddy Motors. He was said to have run away after the incident. He was also detained for four days and was released after that.

The mother of the deceased told our correspondent that the matter was transferred to Enugu State Police Command for further investigation.

She said, “Two weeks after, the IPO one Ifeanyi told us to bring N150,000 for autopsy or the suspects would be released, and he later released both the owner of the gun and the suspected killer of my son. Now they are asking that we should pay N180,000 for the same autopsy.

“I begged the police that since my family could not afford to pay such amount of money and they have released the suspects, they should release the corpse of my son so that we can bury him and allow his soul to rest,” she said.

Mrs Ukwa, who appealed to Nigerians to prevail on the Enugu State Police Command, to release the body of her late son for burial, noted that since the incident happened, she had not known peace even as she cried that justice should be served in the case.

Speaking further amidst sobs, the grief-stricken mother said, “Our son was killed by a well-known transporter and all our efforts to get the police to arrest and prosecute him failed. There were eyewitnesses but police decided to look at the other way. If I can afford to pay autopsy, I will not wait this long because I want to bury my son. They detained the corpse of my son for three years and six months while the suspects are walking free and living their normal lives. We have left everything to God who is the ultimate judge. All we are asking is that the police should release our son so that we can bury him and allow his soul to rest in peace.”

When contacted, the Commissioner of Police in Enugu State, Ahmed Abdurrahman, told our correspondent that said that he would look into the matter.

The CP said, “This is an allegation against my men and I need somebody to complain, but you are sounding as if you want me to confirm or not, that is not my job.

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“However, don’t worry I am going to go into it directly, just send me those involved so that I know the case. I will look into it and get back to you.

“I promise you if I see anything that is wrong in it you know I am not the type that take nonsense I’m going to deal with whoever is involved in any illegality in the case.”

But police sources in the homicide said that they could not continue to detain the suspects without evidence. “In this very case, the family is expected to pay police N56,000 which is the amount for autopsy and pay N50,000 for the pathologist. If it is not done, the case will linger for ever and you cannot detain a suspect if you do not have any proof.”

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