

My husband not a cultist, his killing by soldier planned –Wife of slain UNICAL final-year student

Alexander Okere 17 July 2021

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Mrs Tracy Ekpezu and the late Gray Ekpezu

Mrs Tracy Ekpezu, 29, is the wife of the late Gray Ekpezu, 34, a final-year student of the University of Calabar, Cross River State, who was allegedly shot dead by a soldier in the metropolis. She tells ALEXANDER OKERE how her husband was killed

Where were you on the day your husband was killed?

I was in the house. We had just finished eating at some minutes past eight in the night. At about that time when we were eating, his mother called and asked him to come to her place, that our child was disturbing her. After eating, he went to his mother's place and returned with my child; he told me my child didn't want to sleep there (his granny's place). When he returned, the power supply was restored, so he connected his phone to charge. He bought a seasonal movie, so I asked him whether he would not stay back to see the movie. But he said he wanted to get something outside; I think it was about 9:10pm when he left.

It was not up to an hour later that someone came to the house and called me to say Gray was shot by a soldier. When I asked the person what happened, the person said when my husband came to buy something, he saw my brother and his friend, and he stopped to hang out with them. So, he sat down there with them, and all of a sudden, a soldier and three men in 'Boys Scout' uniform came and ordered everybody there to lie on the ground. While they were lying on the ground, one person pointed at my husband; the soldier shot in the air and then shot him. When they shot him, they left but wanted to return to kill the remaining people lying on the ground. One of the others lying on the ground heard the soldier saying that, so they stood up ran away.

Do you think your husband was trailed?

It was not accidental. It was a planned work; I know it was.

What was your husband's occupation?

He was a final-year student of Genetics and Biotechnology at the University of Calabar. He also worked in the (Cross River) State House of Assembly.

How did you feel when you heard what happened to him?

I was confused because I was with my child in the house. I ran out of the house naked; people held me. I was confused and started shouting because he left the house less than an hour before he was shot.

Did he have any misunderstanding with anyone at work or school before the day he was killed?

No. He did not have a problem and did not tell me anything. The thing is very devastating; that is why I want the government to investigate the matter. Leaving me with a four-year-old child is something I don't know how to cope with. Somebody who was not sick just stepped out to buy something and before we knew it, he was shot by a soldier from nowhere – a soldier for that matter, somebody who is supposed to protect life. I just want the government to make sure the matter is not swept under the carpet.

Did you see his body?

Yes. It is in the mortuary.

Did you also see the bullet wound?

Yes, I saw the bullet; it was very deep. He was shot from the back and the thing (bullet) came out from his chest.

What kind of man was he?

He was a very jovial person. He did not have a problem with anybody. So, I don't know why anyone would plan to take his life just like that. He was the kind of person that didn't have any problem with people. That was why the youths in the community were angry and protested his killing.

He was my childhood friend. We started dating in 2007 and got married in on July 28, 2017 and I know him very well. He was someone who would greet you 20 times if he saw you 20 times. Sometimes, when I walked with him on the road, I got angry because of the way he greeted people – both young and old. I never heard that he had an issue with anybody.

I have heard many speculations surrounding his death. But I know how he died. He wasn't a cultist.

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As a final-year student, did he share his plans with you?

Yes. He planned to get a new apartment. He told me he wanted to buy a Toyota Camry. He also said he would transfer his son to another school. He said he wanted to give his son the best education.

How did his parents receive the news of his death?

When the mother heard, she almost fainted. When she was rushing down, she fell and got a big wound on her leg. His younger brother fainted twice that night. The mum had just the two of them – just two boys – and he was the eldest.

What about his father?

His father is a police officer in Uyo. He came to Calabar last Saturday.

What was his reaction?

He demanded to see the person that shot his son because he wanted to know why the soldier shot his son, why he singled him out and shot him among the people that were there. The father wanted to know who sent the soldier because he knew it (Gray's killing) was planned.

Has your family lodged an official complaint?

Yes. His father went to the police station and lodged a complaint and the police asked for Gray's picture. When he was taken to the mortuary, the

youths were angry, so they went to the general hospital, took his corpse to prisons (Nigeria Correctional Service), Afokang, and said the government should keep the corpse. But I told them (youths) to return the body to the mortuary.

It was reported that the soldier who shot him has been arrested. Are you aware?

Yes. I got a call this morning (Monday) that he (soldier) had been arrested. I was told the soldier wanted to flee from Cross River but he was arrested.

Will your family sue the soldier or the Nigerian Army?

We have plans to do that. We will drag them to court if justice is not done. The army commander assured me (that justice will be done). All I want is justice. I know a million tears cannot bring my husband back. No matter what they do, it's not going to bring him back. All I want is justice for Gray Ekpezu.

I wish for the person (perpetrator) to go where my husband is right now. I was angry and said I would tell the man that shot my husband to look into my eyeballs and tell me what Gray did to him to deserve that kind of death. The government knows the best punishment to give to him. But I'm just pleading with a heavy heart that the government should not sweep this matter under the carpet; my husband shouldn't die just like that.

How do I take care of a four-year-old child? How will we survive? He (my son) asks me every day to tell me where his daddy is. What will I tell him? My son is closer to his father. If I travel for two weeks, he doesn't ask about me but he can't stay for a day without his father.