

SATURDAY FEATURES

Charcoal dealer killed Ekiti chief unjustly and must pay for it – Kinsmen

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Fatunla

Abiodun Nejo, Ado Ekiti

The death of 35-year-old Onibedo of Ilotin Ikole Ekiti, Ekiti State, Chief Sola Fatunla, was painful to many of those who knew him.

Fatunla, a father of six, described as a kind man by those who had contact with him, was killed on Sunday, April 5, 2020, by a Tiv man from Benue State, identified only as Sunday otherwise called ‘Omor.’ He was trying to help his killer revive his charcoal business having borne the burden of the Tiv man’s family for some time.

That Sunday, unknown to him that death lurked around, the chief rented a motorcycle at Ikole Ekiti with which he took Sunday and his wife, Tadeni, to a place where he was to help him with his charcoal business.

Sunday had appealed to Fatunla to assist him by using his position as a chief in Ikole Ekiti to plead with those he claimed seized his charcoal in the bush. But unknown to Fatunla, the Tiv man had allegedly connived with three others to kill and bury him and Tadeni in the bush.

However, on getting to the bush, *Saturday PUNCH* learnt that Sunday and his three collaborators reportedly tied the chief and Tadeni to different trees, beat up the chief with the sides of their cutlasses before they poured petrol on him and burnt him alive. They wanted to mete same punishment to Tadeni before they realised that she had escaped.

But several residents wonder why a charcoal seller would opt to kill his wife and benefactor.

A man, who identified himself only as Gbenga, said, it because Tiv man erroneously suspected his wife, Tadeni, of having an affair with the chief.

Gbenga said after realising the truth the Tiv man apologised to Fatunla for the wrong accusation, following which the chief, in his usual nature, continued to offer assistance to Sunday and his family. He added that no one ever knew the man was nursing any ‘sinister’ motive against the chief until he carried out the dastardly act.

A youth in the area, Oluwasola Onipede, who was among the search party that recovered the body of the chief, said the Tiv man falsely accused Fatunla that he was having an affair with his wife whereas the chief merely helped Sunday’s wife and children.

Onipede, who described the slain chief as a decent man, said, “Onibedo was a kind person. He was nice to the youth in this area. He was a diligent electrician. He was kind and always willing to render assistance. When one of Sunday’s sons was ill, it was chief who came to their aid. “He will sorely be missed. Everything has been dull. Everybody is sad at the development.”

He said the sight at Iyemero bush where the dead remains were recovered was gory, saying, “The body was burnt. It is terrible. They dug two shallow graves there where they intended to bury the chief and Tadeni. It was there that we saw the corpse.”

The Head of Ilotin Quarters and the Olotin Oba Ode Ikole, High Chief Sayo Okunola, who also spoke about the matter, said, “The Tiv man (Sunday) had been coming here for a while. He impregnated a lady who had two children for him. He took that lady as wife, but they were always having misunderstanding, and he consequently abandoned the lady.

“The lady approached my chief, Onibedo, that she and her six children (two for Sunday and four others before meeting him) were suffering and sleeping in a shed. It was then Onibedo asked what happened and she told the chief that she was abandoned by her husband.

“Onibedo pitied the woman and decided to take her and her six children in, fed them and intervened to resolve the couple’s differences. The chief took the lady to look for Sunday in the bush where he was hewing charcoal. When they got to the bush, the chief successfully pleaded with the husband and resolved the crisis.”

Okunola said Fatunla assisted Sunday, his wife and family to secure accommodation in Ikole Ekiti so that they could lead a good life, adding that it was Fatunla who helped them to resolve a recent misunderstanding between them which landed them in police station.

He said, “Nobody could think the Tiv man could be nursing another thing against the chief on the issue of his wife.” He noted that could be the reason Fatunla didn’t hesitate nor suspect any evil plan when Sunday appealed to him to assist him by using his position as a chief in Ikole Ekiti to plead with those he claimed had seized his charcoal in the bush.

Okunola said, “He came to the Onibedo that he had some problems with the Ebira people who owned the place where he was hewing charcoal. He appealed to him to help him intervene as a chief because his seized charcoal was enormous. He even promised to teach the Onibedo charcoal business which he said was lucrative.

“The Onibedo rented a motorcycle, took the Tiv man and his wife to the bush purportedly to meet the Ebira unknown to them that the Tiv man had planted three men in the bush. They had even dug two graves where they intended to bury him and Tadeni.

“According to the lady, when the three men appeared, they asked her and the chief to kneel down, collected their phones and tied their hands to different trees. They started beating the chief with the side of a cutlass. After some time when the chief had cried, he (Sunday) tied a stick to his neck, poured petrol and set fire to him alive. That was how Fatunla was burnt to death in agony.

“After burning the chief, the lady said they wanted to kill her but she had escaped. Sunday and his collaborators were confused on realising that the lady had escaped. They carried out the killing in a bush around Iyemero in Ikole Council area.

“The four men escaped with the motorcycle through Patigi in Kwara State for onward journey to Benue. They confessed that their plan was to sell the motorcycle at Patigi and cross to Benue State with the proceeds.”

Okunola, who described the killing of Fatunla as ‘horrible and terrible’, said, “Nobody has slept since Sunday. Even youths are angry and preparing to protest over the gruesome and heartless killing.

“We are the ones calming them down that they should have faith in the law. What could have happened is better imagined. There is a lot of tension in the town now.”

The leader, who expressed worry that the Tiv man, upon his arrest at Patigi and transfer to Ikole Police Division, was boasting that there was nothing anybody could do to him on the killing, said, “We want justice in this matter.

“We want nothing but justice, pure, raw justice from the government. Chief had six children and a wife. The six children are young. Despite this, he was taking care of Sunday’s two children and their mother. What he did was help, clear help, nothing attached.”

A youth in the community, who is the councillor representing Ward 4, at Ikole Local Government Legislative Council, Aanu Onipede, said, “Justice should be done in the matter. We are not happy because it is an insult and he (the killer) undermined us. The man was kind to him and he repaid his good deeds with evil.

“There was a time Sunday’s child took ill, chief spent N21, 000 at the hospital for the child to be treated. Chief reconciled the man and his wife and advised him on the need to take care of his children. Should this be how to pay back?”

Onipede said the deceased agreed to go with Sunday the day he was killed because he knew he had a ‘clean and clear conscience that he had no affair with the man’s wife’ and had no cause to suspect him of evil intention.

The councillor added, “It was when chief could not be found at about 8pm that Sunday that we raised the alarm especially that he was seen with the Tiv man earlier in the day. Early on Monday morning, the youth organised a search party to the bush at Iyemero.

“When we got to Iyemero, the youth there even accused Sunday of planting hemp on their farm and committed some other atrocities.”

A sister-in-law to the deceased, Mrs Kehinde Ojo, the twin sister of chief’s wife, called for justice in the matter.

She said, “Onibedo was a good man in all ways. He was a kind man and would not rest until any needy person was attended to. He was caring to all”

Explaining how Sunday was arrested, Okunola said, “Having fled the crime scene with the four men on chief’s motorbike, the vigilantes at Patigi (Kwara State) were suspicious and stopped them.

“The four were afraid and their composure at that point gave them away that something was wrong about them. That was why they detained them and collected everything they saw with them including their phones.

“The vigilante members switched on chief’s phone which Sunday had switched off and the screensaver, which was photograph of chief and his wife, appeared. That gave the vigilante members the impression that the phone was stolen.

“They decided to make random calls on the phone and that was how we got to know about it. When we redialled the number, the vigilante members picked the call and asked us to be there at Patigi by 11am the following day, Monday. That was how some policemen and my chiefs went to Patigi.”

The spokesperson for the police in the state, Sunday Abutu, confirmed the incident, saying there was a case of the murder of one of the chiefs in Ikole Ekiti on a farm.

Abutu stated, “The suspect has been arrested. He is in our custody. We are investigating the incident and as soon as our investigation is concluded, he would be charged to court.

“The suspect, according to his confessional statement, said the deceased was going after his wife and he organised three other men, who he informed of his intention to kill the chief, following which he lured the chief into the bush to carry out his intention.”