

SARS CHRONICLES

How police killed my son, called him armed robber, assaulted and detained me – Mother of Ekiti varsity final-year student

Published November 1, 2020



Florence and her husband, Fasere (left); The late Joseph

Mrs Florence Fasere, 62, is the mother of Seyi Fasere, a final-year student of Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, who was shot dead by the police in Ilupeju Ekiti. She tells OLUFEMI OLANIYI how she and her husband, Joseph, were physically assaulted and detained by the police after killing their son

What do you do?

I was a trader but I have not been able to work since the police killed my son, my first child. Seyi was shot dead by a policeman, popularly known as *Akobi Esu* (Devil's firstborn).

Why was he killed?

They said he was an armed robber but my son was not an armed robber. They just wasted his life and the killers are walking freely as if they have not committed any offence.

Where and when did it happen?

It happened in March 2013. He was killed at a police station at Obalasan in Ilupeju Ekiti. It is very close to Oye Ekiti.

How did it happen?

My son, Seyi, was a final-year student at the Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti when the incident happened. He was taking his final examination and had one more examination to take. He had not fully paid his tuition; he still had N100,000 to pay and he said the school management was threatening that he would not be allowed to sit the last examination if he did not pay. He came back home to Ilupeju Ekiti and we were able to raise the money and give to him. I think he had an examination to take the following day.

He went to a barbershop to have a haircut and sent a neighbour to tell me that his younger brother should bring his bag to him at the bus stop – Esinkun. But I told his brother that he could not just leave without returning home to shower and wash off the hair and more importantly, pray before embarking on the journey. I never knew I would not see him alive again. He left around 5:30pm; that was the last time I saw him.

His brother took his bag to him at the bus stop and I was later told that he saw a woman he knew in the bus going to Ado Ekiti and she asked him to join but he said he would wait for a car. But the woman, who is a septuagenarian, Madam Victoria, told us later that he persuaded him to board the bus because she was also going to Ado Ekiti to visit her children. That was how he boarded the bus and they embarked on the journey. Just three of them were in the bus. When they got to Obalasan, they heard that armed robbers were attacking a bank ahead of them and the driver was said to have asked the old woman if she knew a shortcut so they would not run into the robbery scene. They said she gave the driver the direction of another route. The driver was new on that road so he was said to have asked to be directed. At that time, we started hearing gunshots in Ilupeju because it is not very far from us. I was worried and I ran to Esinkun where he boarded the bus but I was told that he had left. Later, the driver parked the bus and they hid somewhere so they could wait until the shooting would stop. The woman said she asked Seyi to go and bring their bags because the driver had dropped their bags and turned back.

Was he shot while carrying the bags or what?

I heard that the policemen combing everywhere to see if they could arrest some of the robbers saw him when he was taking the bags. They arrested him and took him to the station. The woman did not see Seyi again. She returned to Ilupeju because that is where she lives; the woman is resident here. She came to ask if Seyi had come back home because she said they had to abandon the journey because of the robbery incident. I told her that I had not seen him. We started searching everywhere for him but we did not hear that he was arrested and taken to the station that night.

How did you eventually know he was killed at the station?

We heard the following morning that somebody was killed and I called his dad who was in Ado-Ekiti to know if he had seen Seyi but he said no. I told him about what happened. The following morning, one of my younger brothers called me and told me that they had killed Seyi at the station. I left and his dad also came from Ado-Ekiti and together with Blessing, his younger brother, we left for the police station.

What happened at the police station?

Immediately we got there, the policemen there grabbed me and beat me ruthlessly. They slapped me about 20 times and kicked me several times; they removed my slippers and used them to hit my head. Despite what happened, they beat me, humiliated me and put me behind the counter. I was just weeping and crying to God that why would this terrible thing happen to me.

My husband too was not spared, they slapped him so many times. They removed his shoes and used them to hit his head. They brutalised us and my husband was put in a cell at the police station and not behind the counter. I fell down there and to compound my sorrow, they brought my son's corpse and put it before me and asked me to be looking at my son. There is no agony that can be worse than that for a mother. I wept bitterly.

Why did they beat you and your husband?

They said Seyi was an armed robber. They said we did not bring him up well and that was why he became an armed robber. But I was weeping and telling them that my son was not a thief and each time I said that, one of them would slap me.

Did you notice anything about his corpse?

They had removed his shirt and tied his hands behind his back. His trousers were worn inside out. That confirmed it that he was arrested before he was killed and he was not killed while shooting at them as they claimed. Will an armed robber tie his two hands behind his back and be shooting? Even if I did not go to school, I know that is not logical but they wasted my son's life, humiliated me, and labelled my son an armed robber. It is only God that can remove that sorrow from my heart. They offended Seyi's creator, who is God almighty and I know He will fight for us.

Was any of the armed robbers that actually attacked the bank arrested?

They killed him around 4am and put his corpse before me from 7am until the time they saw one of the armed robbers who participated in the robbery. I think the armed robber was shot during a gun battle between them and the police. He was wounded and was in pain. He was found the following morning and residents drew the attention of the police to him and they picked him up. He was begging them to take him to hospital to be treated. He didn't want to die. He was one of the armed robbers. I heard him say he only distributed guns to the robbers but not a marksman. He said they all came from Kogi State and that he is Ebira.

The policemen asked the arrested armed robber if Seyi was one of them and he said he was not a member of their gang. He said six of them came from Kogi State for the operation.

That was when they asked us to go home. Seyi's brother, Blessing, was also thoroughly beaten and he was handcuffed and locked up. At a point, they took him in handcuffs to our house to search everywhere. But what would they find in the house of a poor person? They found nothing. They tarnished our image because some people saw how Blessing was handcuffed and led to the house by the police. They heard that the police killed Seyi so they would conclude that my children were armed robbers but God sees everything and I want Him to fight for me.

They eventually released us and asked us to go home when they knew Seyi was innocent but they did not admit that they were wrong. The three of us were put on a motorcycle and asked to be taken home to mourn our son.

Did they release the corpse to you for burial?

They later took his corpse to the mortuary at the Federal Medical Centre, Ido Ekiti. His hands were tied behind his back the way he was killed. We went there a number of times but I became tired at a point. We were asked to go and get his remains from the mortuary after almost three years after the incident. I brought him home and buried him but since then, I have not been okay. The sorrow led to high blood pressure and after the beating, I know that I have not been alright but there is nothing I can do about it.

Is the policeman who you said shot Seyi still in Ilupeju?

They transferred all of them out of the place because there were a series of protests held at the time by students. The National Association of Nigerian Students, EKSU students, and youths in Ilupeju were always protesting then because they knew that Seyi was not a thief let alone an armed robber.

A security man at a school close to the place where the incident occurred later came and told us that he saw Seyi at the police station and that Seyi begged him to inform us that he had been arrested. But the man said he did not know Seyi. He said Seyi answered all the questions the policemen asked him when he was there at the station and that immediately after he left the police station, he heard a gunshot and knew that they had killed him.

His name is Ojo. He lives in Ilupeju here. The man said Seyi begged them not to kill him. He said he told them that he was not a thief but they did not listen. The man said a chief told the police to kill Seyi. The man said the chief said Seyi's parents refused to allow him (Seyi) to be installed as a chief.

Was Seyi entitled to become a chief or what?

They wanted to give him a chieftaincy title which never existed in his father's lineage. The so-called title has to do with idol worshipping and we said no. They wanted to use that to destroy our Christian faith but we rejected it. We said our son was still in school and was not interested in such a chieftaincy title.

Which church do you attend?

We all attend Deeper Christian Life Ministry. Seyi was a children's teacher in church until his death. Even after church service, he would gather kids together in our area and teach them the word of God.

When we heard it was someone who told the police to shoot Seyi, my younger brother went to the Palace of Apeju of Ilupeju and he said he overheard someone telling somebody on the telephone that they should not have killed him. The issue became very serious then.

I suffered a lot and I was advised to see the former state governor, Ayo Fayose, about it. But when I got there, they said he had just left his office. But he was not the governor then. Somebody called him on the phone and he said that I should inform journalists in Ado-Ekiti about it; that was when the police realised that the matter had become serious. But despite that, they did not do anything.

Was the case taken to court or how did it end?

I was asked to get a lawyer and I did. I went to court a number of times and the court asked the policemen to also appear. But you know how court cases go; I became tired of the whole process and refused to go to court again. They killed my son and I was still going to court every time and wasting time and money.

Why didn't you tell Governor Kayode Fayemi, who was the governor at that time?

The governor heard about the case and instructed the Secretary to the State Government, Ganiyu Owolabi, who is also from Ilupeju Ekiti, to address the issue. I was told the governor said the SSG should not be in the office while there was a serious crisis in his hometown.

Did the SSG come?

He came to the palace and we were invited but I left there in anger.

Why?

He asked what we wanted them to do. But because it was still fresh then, I said if they gave me money, would I not spend it? What can anyone give me to replace the life of my son? I left the meeting in anger. Government's agent killed my son and they did not do anything about it. How

much can anybody give me?

What do you want to be done to those who killed Seyi?

I cannot judge but I want God to judge his killers. He was my first child and they just killed him like that. That sad incident destroyed everything about my life. I can no longer trade and I only eat when people give me money. I don't have the strength to work again and I still feel a lot of pain. It is God that can remove the bitter experience from my heart.

Will you testify before the Panel of Enquiry set up by the state government to get justice for victims of police brutality?

I will testify if they call me. I will tell them how I was stripped naked by my son's death.

What is your view about the #EndSARS protests all over the country?

They were one of God's judgments against the police. They killed many people who did not commit any offence. Do you think God will applaud them for taking innocent lives? I consider the protests as God's judgment against their evil acts.

Did any of your children join any of the #EndSARS protests?

They are all in Ado-Ekiti; I am the only one at Ilupeju. Three of them have graduated from university and have nothing to do. So, I asked them to learn skills that will help them. One is an apprentice photographer; one is an apprentice mechanic while one is an apprentice tailor. The last one is at the technical college in Ado-Ekiti. My husband is also in Ado-Ekiti; he is a security guard, collecting N10,000 per month.