

# NOUN clerk arrested for allegedly killing colleague over N70,000 debt

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The suspect

## **Afeez Hanafi**

A senior clerk at the National Open University of Nigeria, Makurdi centre, Benue State, Iko Danasabe, has been arrested for the alleged murder of his colleague, Francis Atache.

Danasabe reportedly connived with some gang members to kill Atache, also a clerical official at NOUN, and dumped his corpse in a bush.

City Round learnt that Danasabe was into a contribution scheme and had given Atache N70,000 to help him deposit the money with the thrift collector. Atache was said to have failed to deposit the money and refused to return it to Danasabe.

After several attempts to get him to refund the sum, Danasabe allegedly engaged some suspected members of a cult group which he belonged to and waylaid Atache at a smoking joint.

They reportedly hacked him to death and disposed of his body in a bush close to the joint. It was gathered that some passersby who perceived foul smell oozing from the spot alerted the police who removed the corpse and later arrested Danasabe.

A police source told our correspondent that the clerk was arraigned at a Makurdi magistrates' court and was remanded in a correctional centre.

The source said, "The victim's relatives were scared that the suspect would go scot-free because there was not enough evidence to prosecute him and petitioned the Inspector-General of Police who ordered another investigation.

"The case was referred to the Intelligence Response Team led by DCP Abba Kyari and the suspect was recalled from the prison. Further investigation linked him to the murder and he was confronted with facts. He eventually confessed.

"He confessed that he sent his friends to monitor the victim till they trailed him to a spot and hacked him to death. Further investigation revealed that both were cult members and the suspect claimed that the victim vowed not to pay the money again."

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Danasabe, in his statement, admitted to have orchestrated an attack on Atache but said he did not intend to kill him.

The 31-year-old man also denied that Atache was hacked to death, claiming that he and his gang members only beat him up and abandoned him at the scene.

He said, “I am a staff member of NOUN, Makurdi branch. I started working with NOUN five years ago. I started as a senior clerical officer. I used my diploma to apply for the work but I now have a BSC in public administration.

“Francis (Atache) was a junior clerical officer and worked under me. If I generate data for students to pay their school fees at the bank, I usually give him the money to help me pay.

“So, sometime in June 2020, I was preparing to go to Nasarawa and gave Francis my monthly N70,000 contribution for a thrift scheme organised by one Alhaji. I told him that if he paid the money, they would give him a paper which would serve as a receipt and the payment would reflect in my balance.”

Danasabe explained that when he returned from the journey, he asked for the receipt but Atache promised to bring it to work the next day.

He said the victims gave other excuses the following day when he requested the receipt, adding that he later reported him to his (Atache's) elder sister who they worked in the same office.

He stated, “When I did not hear from her sister after two days, I reminded her and she blamed me for entrusting Francis with money. He started threatening me with a gun; I even reported the matter to our boss and told him that if he wanted to do a confraternity war, he should let us do it outside the office.

“Later I reported the case to the vigilantes in our area and he begged me to give him two days. The two days elapsed and extended to a week. I reported him to the vigilantes again. Francis then challenged me to bring a proof that I gave him the money and vowed that he was not going to pay.

“I was bitter because I knew at that point that he was not going to give me the money. I contacted my cult members and asked them to monitor his movement. There is a joint near one Bishop’s farm where we normally go to smoke and relax.”

He said on August 5, he got information that Atache was at the joint and he led 15 gang members to the spot to attack the victim.

He added, “I confronted him with the issue and my boys asked him to surrender the money he had with him but he refused. He had more than N70,000 on him which he wanted to use to buy weed in bulk. He sold weed to boys in the town. Meanwhile, while we were coming, I brought an axe and the other came with their guns.

“When he refused to surrender the money, we started fighting. He stood up and came after me, my boys hit him with a stick from the back and he fell down. He started bleeding and stopped moving. Everyone was terrified and ran away from him. I ran home and took some of my clothes and left my house.

“I got information that the police found the body. We did not hide it. Unfortunately I was found and arrested. I did not expect him to die like that. After some days in police detention, I was remanded in prison. I claimed to be innocent. I was shocked when on August 29 police came and picked me. They had arrested some of the boys who witnessed the incident. I had no choice but to tell them the truth.

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“I only wanted to scare him but he died in the process. I am not the one who hit him with the stick but I pinned him down on the floor while my guys were beating him up.”

The NOUN Study Centre Director at Makurdi, Benue State, Prof. Fidel Okopi, told our correspondent on the telephone that he was aware of Danasabe's arrest but not the offence he was accused of.

He said, “When they were taking him away, he said they should go to the compound and told some staff members that he was being taken away. That was all. We did not hear from him again.

“The colleague (Atache) was killed and we informed the university that one of our staff members had been killed. We also knew he had been arrested but nobody told us what he was arrested for. I wrote to the university that he was arrested and taken to Makurdi correctional centre but I don't know his whereabouts.”

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