

Nigerians shouldn't let police get away with my sibling's killing –Imo artisan

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CHIDIEBUBE OKEOMA

*A 24-year-old Imo-based artisan, Chinaza Okonkwo, tells **CHIDIEBUBE OKEOMA** how policemen from Ihitte/Uboma Division in Imo State killed his elder brother, Chinanu, while demanding hospital treatment for his arrested 17-year-old younger sister*

What is your name?

My name is Chinaza Okonkwo. I am 24 years old. I am from Umuderim in the Ihitte/Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State.

What was the issue between your family and the police recently?

On Monday, March 8, policemen from Ihitte/Uboma Divisional Headquarters at Ishinweke killed my elder brother, Chinanu.

What was the issue between your elder brother and the police?

My 17-year-old younger sister, Chinyere Okonkwo, who was working as a sales girl in a betting shop at Ishinweke, was arrested by the police on the complaint of another sales girl. The arrest happened on Sunday.

On the night of the following day, which was Monday, around 10.33pm when everyone in our house had slept, two policemen drove into our compound and attempted to dump my sister in front of the house. They brought her almost dead in a Hilux van and attempted to dump her on the third step of the pavement in front of the house. On hearing movements outside the house, my elder brother, Chinanu, and my wife and I came outside to see what was happening. Then we discovered my sister lying on the pavement, looking very abnormal. We discovered that she was neither breathing nor talking.

We then noticed the police van parked some distance away from our house; the engine and lights of the van were off. We approached the vehicle and saw two men carrying guns; we then asked them to identify themselves but they could not as they had no identity cards on them.

Later, we identified one of them as Israel, who they also call Pastor. We asked them what happened to our sister, but they were not coming up with any satisfactory response. They told us our sister was sick so they decided to bring her back. We found their statement very unconvincing. This was a girl who did no wrong but the police arrested and detained her because someone lodged a complaint against her. This was a girl who was hale and hearty before she was arrested.

What did you do then?

We asked the policemen why they decided to bring the girl back home rather than take her to the nearest hospital. We were convinced that the plan by the policemen was just to secretly dump my sister in the front of the house so that she could die there. So, we insisted that the policemen should take the girl to the hospital without delay. But rather than listen to us, the policemen resorted to intimidation. But we stood our ground, telling them they could not dump an almost dead girl on us. We told them it was wrong to attempt to dump my sister in that condition.

While this argument was going on, villagers started gathering. That was when the policemen agreed to take my sister to the hospital. One of them went to bring their vehicle closer so they could take the girl to the hospital. After they put her in the vehicle, we decided that since we didn't know them, one of the policemen should take the girl to the hospital while the other should stay with us. They agreed and the one called Israel chose to take the girl to the hospital while his colleague waited. Then all of sudden, after Israel had driven off, the other policeman started running away. We immediately raised the alarm, which attracted people; we began to chase him down the major road. We eventually caught up with him on the highway. After he was caught, the crowd made him to sit in the middle of the road because it was around 11.30 pm and there were no vehicles on the road.

We told him that we had no plan to attack him, that all we wanted was for our sister to be okay. While we stood there waiting for information on the condition of our sister, the policeman got up and stood apart from us with his rifle in hand. Then suddenly, we noticed a vehicle speeding from Isiinweke, the local government headquarters side and coming towards us. As the vehicle approached, the policeman took off again and ran towards the approaching vehicle. It was then we realised that there were three policemen in the vehicle. Our guess was that Israel, who drove away with our sister, had communicated with their station and gave misinformation that we were attacking his colleague.

On approaching, the three policemen jumped down from the vehicle and one of them aimed his gun at my elder brother, Chinanu, and shot him. My brother died instantly. This was in the presence of some villagers and me.

But it was said that the three policemen met you beating their colleague.

Nobody touched their colleague. All we wanted was that nothing should happen to our sister, who was very healthy when she was arrested but was brought back almost dead.

The police said your sister was asthmatic.

That is not true. My sister was very healthy. The police need to investigate and find out what the officers did to my sister.

Where is your sister now?

There is no information regarding her whereabouts since the policeman took her away. We don't want to believe she is dead as people are saying. The police should tell us the hospital they took her to and where she is. If she is dead, we want to see her corpse and if she is alive, let them tell us where they kept her. She is 17 years old and did not deserve anything that the police did to her.

What is your family doing about the killing of your brother?

We want justice for Chinanu Japhet Okonkwo, my brother. The policeman who shot and killed him should be made to face the full wrath of the law because they should not be shooting and killing people they are paid to protect. We also want to know where our missing sister is. My father is late and my mother is a poor widow. Nigerians should come to our rescue. I don't want to believe that I have lost two siblings in one night in the hands of people who are paid to protect us.

What kind of a person was your brother?

My brother was a simple person. He was a sociable person. He was an artisan and was very hard-working. People in the village can testify to it that he was not a troublemaker.

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