

Army said my two sons, three other wedding guests were killed by mistake –Taraba pensioner

Soldiers in Taraba State on April 2, 2021 allegedly gunned down five youths who were returning from a wedding. Mallam Bello Jen, whose two sons were among the slain youths, speaks to TYOPUUSU JUSTIN about his quest for justice

Please introduce yourself.

My name is Mallam Bello Aliyu Jen. I am a retired civil servant with the Taraba State Government and I hail from Ardo-Kola Local Government Area of the state. Currently, I am an ex-officio member of the Taraba State Union of Pensioners.

Two of your sons were among the five youths recently killed by soldiers. How did it happen?

At about 2am on April 2, 2021, one of my sons came and knocked on my door and told me that two of his brothers were killed. I asked with shock, how and when it happened, but he was not quite sure as to what actually happened. He then proceeded to the scene of the incident. It was when he got to where the incident happened that he confirmed to me that they were killed by soldiers.

When I sought information regarding their corpses, he told me that soldiers who killed them loaded their remains into their Hilux van and were heading to Jalingo.



•Mallam Bello Jen

I went out to join him, where he told me the incident had happened and about 30 minutes later, I saw the soldiers in their Hilux van moving towards Jalingo.

I followed them to the Federal Medical Centre, Jalingo and while they were preventing people from coming close. I walked past them and attempted to get to the Hilux where the corpses were.

They tried to stop me, but I told them, I would not mind being killed, so I could join my children. The soldiers then allowed me to go and check. On getting to the Hilux van, I saw two of my sons, Abdulkadir Bello, a final year student of the College of Agriculture, Jalingo and Tukur Bello, who just finished secondary school last year. On seeing their corpses, I shook my head and started crying. The soldiers apologised to me, and told me that the boys were killed by mistake. I asked them, "What kind of mistake made you take the lives of my two children and three others?" But they could not provide any answer.

I asked them again to provide the weapons the children were carrying and they could not provide



•Abdulkadir Bello



•Tukur Bello



•Philip Yakubu



•Abubakar Barkindo



•Zayya'u Misa

any. After a while, they dropped the corpses and drove off. Myself and other parents whose children were killed demanded the corpses for burial and we were directed back to Ardo-Kola Local Government to meet the Divisional Police Officer there. We went and the process delayed till 4pm when the corpses were released to us. We then took the corpses and buried them according to Islamic rites.

What did the military authorities say about the incident?

As I told you earlier, they simply told us it (the killing) was a mistake and that was all. We have not heard anything from them since that day.

We learnt some others survive the incident with bullet wounds. What did they tell you actually happened on that fateful day?

Yes; an invitation was shared among the people in our area for the marriage ceremony of one Sule Soja in Garin Baka. So, on the wedding day, they (my sons and others) went to Garin Baka and when they exhausted the money they had on them at the wedding, they decided to return home. They had four motorcycles, but two left before the ones carrying my children took off. The first two motorcycles ran into a military

checkpoint midway. The soldiers asked them where they were coming from and they told them they were coming from a wedding. They referred the soldiers to the music that was coming from the wedding ceremony which was still very clear at the point where they were stopped.

They explained to the soldiers that they were returning from the wedding. In the process one of the soldiers fired a gunshot in the air. Meanwhile, some of the soldiers were lying down behind and when my children were approaching the checkpoint, they opened fire on them and killed the two of them. Three others were also killed, while three of the youths escaped with bullet wounds.

What efforts are you making to get justice for your sons?

These young men killed innocently were pillars of our families and we cannot just fold our arms and watch. We are definitely going to court. We intend to reach out to the National Human Rights Commission and in the coming days, we, the parents of the victims, are going to take up the matter. Already, a lawyer has written the Army authorities and other actions will follow soon.