

# Soldiers mocked me after torturing my son to death – Delta policewoman

*Kayode Oyero 18 December 2021*

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Christian and Mercy Ehima

# **An Assistant Superintendent of Police with the Delta State Police Command, Mercy Ehima, tells KAYODE OYERO the horrific encounter of his 24-year-old son, Christian, in the hands of some soldiers at the Railway Checkpoint in Igbanke, Edo State, which led to his death**

*Please introduce yourself.*

My name is ASP Mercy Ehima. I am 53 years old and I have been with the Nigeria Police Force for about 31 years. I am with the State Intelligence Bureau but attached to the Area Commander, Agbor, Delta State as the SIB Coordinator. My husband died 18 years and five months ago when Christian was just five years old. I gave birth to three boys and Christian was my first child.

*What happened to your son, Christian?*

On Friday, December 10, 2021, my son, Christian Ehima, travelled to a village called Ewesa in Edo before Benin. He told me he wanted to attend a marriage ceremony the following day (Saturday) and I told him I was afraid of the road between Igbanke and Akpon, so I took him to someone I know very well for him to spend the night till the following morning where he would leave for the wedding.

In the evening, around 6pm, my son called me to say that it was cold there and he could not stay there any longer. He said he wanted to start coming back home. I was tired at the time as I just came back from work, so I told him to tell the person he was with to look for a vehicle for him.

Later, he called me again and asked that I send him airtime but I was tired and there was no one around to get recharge card. My son used the fellow's number to call me back that the cold was biting and he had serious headache because the place was bushy. He said he would join a trailer or a tanker if he couldn't get a commercial bus. I was busy cooking and was waiting for him but around 7pm I was surprised he wasn't yet back as Ewesa was just about 40 minutes' drive from where I stayed.

*What did you do at that point?*

I called my son and behold it was a soldier that picked his call. The background was noisy. I asked who the person was and he said he was a soldier at railway checkpoint in Igbanke, Edo State. I asked the soldier of my son's whereabouts and introduced myself as a police officer. The soldier speaking with me on the phone then said my son dragged their guns with them. At that point, I begged them even though I knew that my son couldn't do that. I begged them not to kill my son and not to do him any harm and they said okay, because I said I am a police officer, they won't shoot him again as they planned to shoot him before. I begged them and they told me to start coming. I took a tin of milk along and mounted a bike because it was already dark.

*What transpired when you got to the checkpoint?*

I got to the checkpoint together with the bikeman and I approached an elderly soldier among them. They handed me my son's phone and his white shirt and singlet. Both were dusty. I asked them where my son was and they said I should wait for a while. They delayed me more than 40 minutes.

They later made a call and gave me the phone to speak to one of them on the other side whom they introduced as their boss. I spoke with the person who asked me to confirm that I was the mother of the boy. I confirmed that he was my son and asked them to take me to where he was as it was getting darker.

All of them again converged at a point and when they came back, the oldest among them told me to get up and we crossed the road and they pointed the torch to the direction of a pit. 'Don't you see that pit?' the soldier asked me. He said when they cocked their guns, my son ran into the pit. I was shocked and I

knew they had harmed my son because when I introduced myself as a police officer, they knew there was problem for them and they were looking for ways to defend themselves.

*Did you see your son in the pit?*

In the pit, I saw my son lying down on his back helpless with his belly up. He wore only his underwear and this was a child that complained of cold and headache. The soldiers exposed him to cold and all his body, his eyes, nose, mouth, ear, every part covered with sand. I shouted in shock.

My son was struggling to stand up but he was weak and fell. The soldier who took me there said, ‘Don’t you see that he is acting like a mad person?’ I told him my son was not mad but he was weak from the severe beatings they subjected him to. I begged the soldiers to help me rush the boy with their Hilux vehicle so that he would survive. I promised to give them N20,000.

*Did the soldiers accept to help rush your son to a nearby hospital?*

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No, they refused and told me to call the police to help me since I am a police officer. My son was struggling in the process but the soldiers did not allow me

to get close to him. I called the Area Commander in Agbor but unfortunately, his line was not reachable. I called my family doctor, Dr Nkem, and he came with his wife. That was after an hour. It was already 9pm. They came with a vehicle and when we carried my son, he was very weak and very heavy.

We took him to the hospital and they cleaned him up and placed him on drip. Around 2am on Saturday, my son woke up and complained of hunger and thirst but the doctor said I shouldn't give him any food as he was suffering from internal bleeding.

*Did your son tell you about his encounter?*

Yes, he told me that he never knew he boarded a kidnappers' vehicle. He said they were close to the railway checkpoint where the soldiers were when the driver of the vehicle reversed. My son said he jumped down from the vehicle in the process and ran into the bush. He said he sent me a text message in the bush but I didn't come. He said as he was proceeding in the bush, he saw a big snake and jumped out of the bush. He said he ran to the Army checkpoint, which was about four poles away. He said he thought the soldiers would come to his aid but as he was about to narrate his ordeal to them, they kicked him and he fell on the ground and they started to hit him.

He said they asked him to get up and remove his shirt and trousers, which he did. They did all sorts of things to him before they led him to the other side of the road where they pushed him where I met him. Immediately he said so, he started complaining that his belly was tight and he gave up the ghost.

He was just 24 years old and he studied Computer Science at the University of Benin. He told me he had some carry-overs and was going to sit the exams for him to be cleared for the National Youth Service Corps. He was into website designing and it was through it that he was able to make some money to establish a sachet water manufacturing plant some four months ago.

***Was the matter reported to the police?***

When he died, I reported the matter to the police station at Igbanke and the soldiers were invited but they laughed it off especially the youngest one among them, light in complexion, whom my son said he was the one that dealt with him. The fair-skinned soldier said, 'You see, your son is dead, all these Yahoo boys, they know what they are doing.' I handed over my son's dusty clothes to the police and they flatly denied that the shirt I came with was the one they gave me.

The Commissioner of Police in Edo State (Philip Ogbadu) invited me on Monday to give extra information and he said a signal would be raised to the Nigerian Army. Those soldiers are still at the checkpoint. I still saw them on Thursday at the same spot. I want justice to be served on this matter. I want those who were responsible for my son's death to be brought to book.

***Has your son been buried?***

No, his body is at the mortuary; an autopsy has not been done.