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From hideout, I saw policemen hack dad to death, shoot his nephew dead – Son of Ogun farmer labelled a terrorist by police

DAUD OLATUNJI writes about the dust raised by the killing of two villagers in Ogun village by police who subsequently labelled them terrorists

"I escaped by a whisker when the police ambushed my father and his nephew. They rained bullets on them, but the bullets did not penetrate their bodies. One of the policemen later moved closer to them and forcibly took the Dane gun belonging to Bara (Kolawole) and shot him to death.

The same policeman approached my father, took his machete and hacked him to death. I saw how he killed them from where I hid," said 25-year-old survivor, Alani Ojugbele. The duo were allegedly killed by the police a few hours after an Inspector, Omolayo Olajide, was murdered by yet-to-be identified persons during a clash between some herders and Yoruba farmers in Saala Orile, Yewa-North Local Government Area of Ogun State.

The two victims were identified as Kolawole Bara and Sole Ojugbele. While Ojugbele was said to be a nephew to the village head, Bara, popularly called Alape, was identified as a younger brother to the village head of Adekan village near Saala-Orile, Chief Adisa Bara.

Speaking with our correspondent, Ojugbele said the duo and himself were on a motorcycle moving around the villages a few minutes after the violent incident.

He said they were stopped abruptly by a team of policemen around Saala-Orile who shot at them.

He said "I am a farmer. I was with my father when he was killed. Some people came to our house to tell him that the baale wanted to see him and he left. When he returned home, he said the baale asked him to check the village and give him a report of what was happening there. That was how I went with my father to visit the area. When we were returning, my father said that we should pass Saala Orile.

"We decided to assess the areas from Saala Orile to Ijaka-Oke. We saw some policemen at Vulcaniser bus stop at Saala Orile junction and we passed them by towards Ijaka-Oke. We later turned towards Ijaka-Oke after looking around the area. On our way back, the police were still at the junction with their van

"The bike we sat on was driven by Alape (Bara). We went through the area and we turned back towards Saala-Orile to pass through the area to our house. As we passed Ijaka-Oke to Saala-Orile Junction, we met some policemen and one of them alighted from the van and started shooting at us.

"As he shot at my father and Alape, the bullets didn't penetrate their bodies. But after he exhausted the bullets in his gun, he moved towards them and snatched the gun held by Alape and shot at him at a close range. The gun penetrated his body and killed him. Another cop at the same time dragged my dad from the back and used a machete to kill him.

"I fled when the cop started shooting and hid somewhere around. If not for the fact that I was also fortified from bullets, I might have been killed too. It was the police that hacked my father to death and shot Alape dead. After killing them, they put their bodies in their van and drove away. It happened on the Saala-Orile Road near a mechanic shop in the area. My father was not a bandit. He was a farmer.

Alape was also not a bandit, he was a hunter." Announcing the inspector's death, the state police command said he was shot dead by terrorists during a gun duel in the area. The police labelled Bara and Ojugbele killed

the crisis as terrorists.

The spokesperson for the police in the state, DSP Abimbola Oyeemi, in a statement said the incident occurred on Tuesday, January 24, 2022 in Saala-Orile forest in the Yewa-North LGA.

Oyeemi noted that the operatives of the state police command gunned down two terrorists during a gun battle in the forest following the alleged attack on some herders.

Oyeemi claimed that the duo were killed following a distress call received by policemen attached to Ayetoro division that a group of terrorists were attacking some Fulani herdsmen at Isala Orile forest.

According to him, the DPO Ayetoro, CSP Bernard Edigboyan, quickly led his men and operatives of the joint security intervention squad to the scene.

He said, "On sighting the policemen, the bandits opened fire on them and the policemen replied fire for fire.

"At the end of the encounter which lasted for about 20 minutes, two amongst the bandits were shot dead while others escaped with varying degrees of gunshot injuries. Regrettably, an inspector of police, by name Omolayo Olajide, lost his life during the gun duel."

But the villagers disagreed with the police, saying that those killed were not terrorists but hunters and farmers. The villagers identified them as village high chiefs who worked with the village head, Chief Adisa Bara of Adekan village.

In its reaction to the development, Yewa North Patriotic Forum faulted the police on the killings.

The forum in a statement by its spokesperson, Fatolu Ganiyu, condemned the killing of the villagers by the police during a clash between farmers and herders in the area.

The statement read in part, "The forum finds it mischievous, despicable, and inciteful a press release issued on the recent Fulani herders-farmers clash in Saala Orile by the Nigeria Police Force, Ogun State Command, signed by DSP Abimbola Oyeemi (PPRO Ogun State Police Command).

"It is saddening and unacceptable that the police could descend that low to support those suspected Fulani herdsmen which they have known from time immemorial to have been terrorising the farmers, kidnapping and killing innocent citizens.

"It is a deliberate fabrication by the police to tag innocent villagers living within Ayetoro, Saala Orile, Erinpa, and neighbourhood as bandits. This obviously was done in a rush to cover up the unprofessional way its men handled the conflict at Saala Orile."

The forum stated that despite the state anti-open grazing law, the same thing happened when herdsmen with their animals invaded farms of innocent farmers at Saala Orile, Erinpa, Agada and Ogodo, destroying the farms.

It added, "The farmers then called on the hunters to help chase away the animals from their farms. It was at this point that the well armed herders brought out weapons and attacked both the hunters and farmers."

The forum alleged that the herders called the police who promptly responded whereas they never answered previous calls by the farmers to come for their protection.

Saturday PUNCH gathered that the killings were triggered by the inspector's death. It was gathered that the crisis erupted after some herders living in neighbouring villages grazed their cattle on farms located in some villages such as Erinpa, Agada, Ogodo, Ijaka-Oke, Adekan and Saala-Orile.



•Gabriel



Alani

he was sure of the victim's innocence.

The village head said, "They were both hunters and had identification cards. They were chiefs in the village and I always sent them on errands to check the wellbeing of the villagers."

Previous attacks recorded

Last year, Yewa-North witnessed herders' attack which forced several villagers to relocate to neighbouring countries for many weeks.

Many lives and property were lost to the clashes between farmers and herdsmen.

The incident also prompted some northern governor including the Kano State governor, Abdullah Ganduje to hold closed-door and town hall meetings with the state governor Dapo Abiodun and stakeholders in the state.

Also, the state government set up a fact-finding committee with the mandate to uncover both immediate and remote causes of clashes between farmers and herders in the area. The committee which had submitted its report was also asked to recommend a lasting solution to the clashes.

A few months after the submission of the report which was not made public, the clashes continue unabated. An elder brother to one of the victims, Gabriel Ojugbele, said the village witnessed a similar attack by herders last year. He said the attacks had been regular with loss of lives and property.

Ojugbele further said that his village was one of the villages that recorded frequent attacks from herdsmen.

He said, "They not only destroy our farms but also maim and kill our people."

Police fault villagers' claim

In its reaction, the state police spokesperson, Oyeemi described the claim by the villagers as insulting and annoying. Oyeemi said the villagers didn't know the gravity of what they did by killing an inspector.

According to him, policemen killed terrorists who engaged their men in a gun duel.

He said, "Does it mean we are the ones that killed our inspector? Terrorists killed our officer and we engaged them killing two of them. The villagers are now saying the farmers."

Families demand release of corpses

The families of the victims demanded the release of the corpses of their late loved ones, seeking justice for the farmers and hunter.

Ojugbele, who lost his father, said, "What I want from the government is to allow us to take our father's corpse for burial. The police refused to release the bodies of the victims for burial. We need the government to help us retrieve the remains of our slain family members. We also want the government to ensure justice on the matter."

On his part, the village head said "I want the state government to help us. I have sought help from my family and others because I am confused and helpless."

"We ran away from our homes because we are not sure of what may happen if we continue staying in the village."

"We beg the government to wade into this matter. The death of my people who I sent to check the situation of things must be probed."

Also the forum urged the police to withdraw the terror tag on the victims, advising them to "conduct a thorough investigation into the crisis to unveil the criminal element terrorising the neighbourhood."

It called on the Inspector-General of Police to investigate the murders by the police and ensure the prosecution of the perpetrators.



The village head