

Oro worshippers, church members clash, Lagos tailor dies

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A clash between Oro traditional worshippers and worshippers at the Truth and The Spirit Prophetic Church has led to the death of a tailor, Akeem Adebisi, in the Oko-Oba area of Lagos State.

PUNCH Metro gathered that Akeem alongside other Oro worshippers were performing sacrament when they got to know that the church members were conducting a vigil.

The Oro worshippers, upon approaching the prophetess, Mercy Okocha, and her church members, reportedly instructed them to stop the vigil but they disagreed.

It was learnt that the disagreement caused an argument that degenerated into a clash between the Oro traditionalists and the church members who stood their ground on Tuesday.

During the clash, the church members allegedly stoned Akeem to death as some other persons involved in the fight sustained varying degrees of injury.

Our correspondent who visited the scene on Wednesday observed that the church had been deserted.

Property including fans, chairs, and instruments in the church were scattered.

Speaking with our correspondent, a resident, who gave her name simply as Alhaja Sariyu, said an announcement was made for the Oro procession.

She said, “After the announcement, we went indoors very early only to wake up the following day to discover that there was apprehension everywhere.

“The Oro procession has been on for years. So, nobody expected that this particular one was going to be bloody. As a matter of fact, the church has been there for close to five years.”

A trader in the area, who declined to mention her name for security reasons, said the church led by Okocha was fond of conducting vigil every day, adding that it must be “the reason why the confrontation happened.”

An eyewitness, Jamiu Issa, who participated in the procession, alleged that members of the church instigated a mob action against his colleagues on their way back.

Issa said, “We hold our procession every August 22. Before we started our procession that night, we saw some members of the church outside around 10pm, and Akeem went to meet the woman (prophetess) to suspend their programme and instruct her members to go inside.

“So, when we started at midnight, we saw them again and chased them inside the church. Around 1am on our way back, we saw them again and they started throwing stones, bottles and coconuts at us.

“The prophetess asked her female members to go inside, while she and the male members attacked us. They smashed a coconut on Akeem’s face; he collapsed and started bleeding on the spot.

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“We rushed him to about three hospitals but he was rejected. We were told he had lost a lot of blood. He died around 4am on our way to the Lagos University Teaching Hospital.”

Our correspondent also visited Akeem’s father, Wasiu Adebisi, who had been distraught over the death of his son, said he got to know about the attack at midnight.

The 62 year-old said, “Akeem is my first male child. He is the one who always announces the preparation of the Oro festival in the town. When the incident happened, his colleagues rushed to call me in the middle of the night, and when I got there, I was told that they hit his head with a coconut.

“If they actually threw it at him from a distance, the impact would not have been that much. It looked like they held him and broke the coconut on his head. I could not bear the sight of him when I got there, I just returned home while his colleagues took him to hospital. It was in the morning that they told me that he died.”

The Baale of Gbirinmi, Oko Oba, Razaq Alawode, while condemning the attack, demanded justice for the deceased victim, adding that the police were invited to restore normalcy in the community.

“Even when the police came to arrest her, they were scared to enter the church. I was the one that led them inside the church where we found some strange spiritual items. We want the police to ensure that justice is served,” Alawode said.

Efforts by our correspondents to speak with a member of the church proved abortive.

Contacted, the state Police Public Relations Officer, SP Benjamin Hundeyin, said the prophetess alongside nine members of the church had been arrested in connection to Akeem’s death.

“The prophetess, Mercy Okocha, 50, and nine other members of the church, have been arrested. The corpse was deposited in a mortuary for autopsy. An investigation is ongoing,” Hundeyin said.

However, in his remark, a lecturer in the Department of Religious and Peace Studies, Lagos State University, Professor Kabiru Paramole, told one of our correspondents that the incident was avoidable.

He lamented that the clash happened though both religious groups were chasing a common good for society.

Paramole said, “Religiously, what the Oro people were doing, according to them, was nothing but religion. They were being religious because they wanted to fortify their city from several calamities, pains and negativity happening in the society.

“The Christians too were also having a vigil to achieve the same purpose the Oro worshippers were after. I’m very sure that before any Oro comes out, especially in Lagos State, the news is always everywhere; everyone must stay indoors.

“I don’t know if the same kind of news went around the city this time around. If truly the news went around and the Christians still went ahead to hold their vigil, to me as a scholar of religious studies, that’s a wrong step taken by the Christians because they knew people might come towards where they were having the vigil. A clash would be expected in this kind of case.”

Paramole, however, said the clash would have been avoided if the Oro worshippers and church members explored the option of peaceful engagement.

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