

Seeing my parents' mutilated corpses was like nightmare — Enugu man

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By Godfrey George

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*In this interview with **GODFREY GEORGE**, an indigene of Enugu State, Tochuckwu Okonkwo, laments the unprovoked killing of his parents, Mr and Mrs Sunday Okonkwo, by suspected kidnapers who swooped on them on their farm*

Tell us a bit about yourself.

My name is Tochuckwu Okonkwo. I am in my 30s. I am a native of Ukpata community in the Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State. I am a son to the couple whose bodies were found after being kidnapped.

Where and how were your parents kidnapped?

They went to the farm as usual and never came back. They had been farming for many years. In our community, farming is everyone's mainstay. It is what the community is known for. They (my parents) planted cassava and yam, mostly. They sent me to school with proceeds from farming. They were not really educated but they knew the value of education and tried their best to make sure they send us to school.

Because of how close they were, they did everything together. But they went to the farm on Wednesday, November 16, 2022, to harvest their cassava and never returned.

Where were you at the time of the incident?

I don't live in the community. It was my other siblings that called me to tell me about it. I was very disturbed. We first organised a search party. The vigilantes and other security operatives searched and searched for them till it was dark but we didn't find any trace of them. We only saw their baskets and work tools. That was why we suspected that they had been taken away. We also saw some marks, indicating that there was a kind of struggle. One of my siblings, Anthony, went online to raise the alarm about it. So, the security men kept searching but we didn't see them. We tried calling them but their phones had been switched off. We were expecting that the kidnapers would call to ask for ransom, but we got no call; everywhere was just quiet. Everybody was confused and apprehensive. The community had always been peaceful but these people came with their animals and have destroyed everywhere for us.

How did you eventually confirm that they were killed?

We found their bodies in a very terrible way. They were gruesomely killed and dumped in the forest far away from their farms. It was like a dream when I got a picture of their remains. They must have been dead for days. The wrapper used to wrap them showed they might have been killed many days before we found them. They killed my parents for doing absolutely nothing wrong to them. They killed both of them just like that! It is like a dream. We found their bodies exactly two weeks after they were abducted, around December 10, 2022.

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Reports claimed that their remains were mutilated. How true was this?

Of course, they mutilated their bodies. Anybody that tells me that they didn't cut their bodies is lying. They butchered them. I have the pictures. I can send it for the whole world to see. My parents' remains were wrapped in a wrapper and dumped in a bush. They didn't even have the decency to drop the body back at the farm. It took men of the Eastern Security Network to go into the forests and find the bodies for us. My father and mother were killed in one day; I don't wish it for my worst enemy!

You said herdsmen were behind the abduction. How did you know that?

Everybody knows that these Fulani herders have been disturbing my community and the entire Enugu State since 2020. In November, they attacked some farmers at Aguamaede and Mgbuji communities in Eha-Amufu, Isi-Uzo council. They struck the community again in December and killed many farmers. They just invade the land and kill and nothing is done. I have lost my parents today; who will give them back to me? What can bring them back for me?

These herdsmen are calculated. They go through Benue and enter Enugu and go on their killing spree. How can someone go to the farm to look for something to make ends meet and you go there and snuff life out of them? It doesn't make any sense. They made me and my siblings orphans just like that. It is surprising and shocking. I still cannot believe it. They didn't let them enjoy the fruits of their labour. It is not like we are rich people. We are just managing. What did we ever do to deserve this? I cannot still wrap my head around why they did this to us.

What are the police doing about the matter?

I ask again, "What will bring my parents back to me?" If the police say they are not aware of what we are passing through in this community, they are lying. Our case is everywhere. I can tell you that no arrest has been made, and the herdsmen struck again a week or so before Christmas. I don't know what they want. I don't know what the security agents will see to make them take action.

Are the community leaders aware?

The day my parents were kidnapped, the traditional ruler of the community, Igwe Martins Ogwudile, was called by Mr Geoffrey Okafor, a community mobiliser and he came out and spoke to us. What could he do? Is he the police? We all are victims and all this just needs to stop. How many more lives need to go before this will end?