

Bandits killed my brother while daughter was sleeping

— Sibling of slain Kaduna man

Kaduna State indigene, James Magaji, whose brother, Bulus Magaji, was killed by bandits, speaks to **VICTORIA EDEME** on the circumstances surrounding his sibling's death in the Buda community of the Kajuru Local Government Area

WHAT led to your brother's death?

My name is James Magaji. I am Bulus Magaji's younger brother. He was 41. He was the firstborn of our parents, while I'm the third. My family is based in the Buda community, Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State, where we hail from. (The incident) happened on Wednesday, January 24, 2024, around 10:35pm. Bulus was attacked in his home by bandits. We thought that they wanted to kidnap him. After they gained entry into his house, they were just beating him on the head. Bulus was married with four children – three girls and a boy. His older children are in a boarding school. It was only he, his wife, and their two-year-old daughter who were at home during the incident in Buda. The wife managed to escape when the bandits came, so only Bulus and the daughter were left in the house. His daughter was sleeping while her father was being attacked.

Bulus' wife ran out to call for help during the attack. The bandits had sophisticated weapons so nobody could go near Bulus' house to rescue him. His daughter was not harmed, she was just sleeping. After we discovered that the bandits had left, we went to where Bulus was. We saw him squatting on the ground and bleeding. When we found him, he was seriously wounded and we rushed him to a nearby clinic in Maraban Kajuru that same night to stop the bleeding. He was bleeding from the ear, nose, and forehead. He was beaten mercilessly. He had only injuries on his head and not other parts of his body. After the first aid treatment, the doctor discovered that the injuries were too severe for him to handle, so he referred us to the General Hospital, Ungwan Boro. We went there but they said the case was beyond too severe for them to handle and they referred us to the Barau Dikko Teaching Hospital. We were told by specialists there that he had fractures in his head, which affected the brain. Around 9pm on Thursday, January 25, he was pronounced dead. After that, his corpse was conveyed back to the community. The next day, Friday, around 1pm, he was buried in our family cemetery in the community.

Was Bulus the only one who was attacked?

The bandits did not just visit Bulus' house, they visited three houses. They went to Bulus' neighbour, a clergyman in ECWA (Evangelical Church Winning All). They wanted to kidnap him and his wife, but the wife pleaded with them, saying that nobody would pay ransom if they took both of them. So they left the wife at home and kidnapped the reverend gentleman. Another relative was also kidnapped alongside his wife during the Wednesday attack, but they were released on Saturday evening, January 27. The clergyman was released on Monday, January 29. The clergyman hadn't even spent up to a month in the community after he was transferred from where he was. He's just a young man and not everybody knows him. That's why we were shocked. He just came here, so why will he be taken away?

Was any ransom paid?

We haven't heard anything from them. After they were released, my relative and his wife were taken to the hospital for a check-up to make sure that

everything was normal. We won't be able to talk to them until they are fully fit.

Do you also stay with Bulus in the community?

My family stays in the family house. Bulus was no longer staying in the family house. He had his apartment in the same community.

How did Bulus' wife and children receive the news of the death?

We informed the children and brought them back home on Friday, January 26. They felt very devastated. The firstborn is just 13 years old, the second one is nine, and the third one is about eight years old. It is very terrible. We didn't expect this to happen to Bulus. Only God will help his wife and all of us. His wife is an orphan, Bulus was the only one she had and now, he's gone. She has become a widow. What happened to her husband also happened to her parents. Her parents were attacked and killed by bandits too. The bandits attacked her community, killed her parents and other people, burnt houses, and chased residents away from the community. Now, bandits have also killed her husband.

How would you describe your brother?

I don't think we'd have someone like Bulus in our family again. Bulus was a very quiet, calm, and honest person. He was not a talkative or troublesome person. If we call a family meeting, nobody would argue with Bulus if he gave a suggestion, not even our parents. As his brother, I'm testifying to this. You won't find Bulus talking anyhow. If he was not on the farm, you'd find him sleeping. Honestly, we've lost the hero in our family.

What was his occupation?

He was a businessman. He was into buying and selling grains. He had a farm where he cultivated maize. Last year, he got between 30 and 50 bags of maize from his farm. He was also producing 20 to 30 bags of rice every year. He reared animals and was into irrigation farming. He planted pepper too. Two days before the attack, he sold pepper known as ata rodo (scotch bonnet) worth over N200,000. Before his death, he told me that he tried to deposit the money into his account through a PoS (Point of Sale) operator, but it was showing 'pending'. That's another challenge I'm facing now because we don't know if the money was credited to his account or not. I planned to ask his wife if we could get the receipt for the payment. If I can get it, then I will locate the PoS operator and verify if the money has been credited to his account. His wife is just a housewife.

Are your parents alive? What was their reaction to your brother's death?

My father is alive. My father fainted when he learned of Bulus' death because he didn't go to the hospital with us. After we made the call to inform him of the incident, we later discovered that he became unconscious after hearing the news. He was rushed to the hospital and he regained consciousness after about an hour. After that, we talked to him and consoled him. He's stable now. Bulus and I have the same father but

different mothers. After receiving the news of the death, his mother became weak. She just gained some strength recently. I'm just managing myself. I was the one who carried my wounded brother. I just carried him like a baby.

Did any other person die from the attack?

What surprised us was that one of the bandits was shot dead by his fellow bandits during the attack. We found the corpse of one of the bandits in Bulus' compound. We still don't know what happened with the bandits. After we confirmed that the bandits had left, we went into Bulus' house. As we entered, we found someone lying on the ground. We even thought it was Bulus. We later discovered that it was one of the bandits. As we went into the main house, we found Bulus squatting. He was not lying on the ground when we found him. When we saw the person squatting, we asked who it was and Bulus said he was the one. When we saw him, he spoke to us despite his injuries. That was when we took him for treatment. We left the other body there and went to report to the police about the situation. The police then came to take the corpse away.

What has been the response of the police concerning the case?

Honestly, the police are doing nothing about the case. The security arrangement in the Kajuru Local Government Council is poor; the police are not doing anything in our community. The security is poor and we need government intervention on the security challenges we are facing. There are security personnel, but they are not staying where they are needed. They are in the local government headquarters and not in the communities where we face challenges. That's just the problem. They are supposed to set their camps in various communities battling insecurity, but they are not there. When bandits' attacks happen, the personnel will not know. If something happens and you call the security personnel, before they come, the bandits have already done what they want to do and left. When the security personnel come, they'll ask us why we didn't call them. So security should be reinforced to tackle these issues.

Which church was your brother attending?

He was a member of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church. That's the church my family members attend.

How did the church receive the news of your brother's death?

They lost the hero of the church because he was a treasurer in the church. Shortly before the incident, the pastor was away and my brother was the one in charge of the church. The church was boring last week as service was not rendered properly because of my brother's death. Indeed, the church has lost a hero.

Has the church rendered any support to your family since your brother's demise?

The church has been supporting the family. It supported us after the incident and covered the cost of transportation and the burial. The church even bought the coffin for the burial. The church usually observes a seven-day prayer for the family of a deceased member. The prayer began on Friday, January 26, when Bulus was buried, and ended on Friday, February 2. The prayer is for God to comfort the family and the soul of the deceased so that it will rest in peace. During the prayer, the church members came to the house to pray with the family.

As the church treasurer, is the church money still in your late brother's account?

After the seven-day prayers are over, the church will sit and see what they can do concerning the money that is with him. We do not have access to his account at the moment. The first child is just 13. I don't know if



the boy is the next of kin or if he would be able to access the money. We expect my brother to use his first son as next of kin. Right now, we have not confirmed. After the prayers are over, we will go through his files.

Has such an attack happened before?

This is not the first attack. We've had previous attacks. This time last year, the same thing also happened. A clergyman was shot to death and his wife was taken away. We have been having these challenges in various communities in the Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State. I'm calling on the Federal Government to restructure the security issues in the local government. Most attacks happen at night but when you call the security personnel, they don't come. The soldiers in the local government hardly go out at night when they are being called. The government needs to do something. In October, the bandits asked us to gather money for them. We had to pay them about N1m for them to allow us to harvest what we planted. Just three months later, they are still attacking us. I was using a smartphone before but after various attacks when my smartphones were taken from me, I no longer use a smartphone. I've been attacked like five times and my phones were taken from me. I'm tired of using smartphones so they won't take it from me. Now, if they want to attack me, I will just remove my SIM card and throw the small phone away. It's not like I cannot afford a smartphone, I can't use it because of attacks.

How has the community reacted to your brother's death and the bandits' attack?

Most residents of Buda have packed their belongings and left the community. Only a few people are in the community now. It's just my family and other relatives who are still around in the community. As Bulus was recently buried, we had to stay back to receive condolences. We are still in the village. We can't move out because the community is our fatherland. We can't leave our fatherland. I'm also into irrigation farming. I grow pepper, just like my brother. We battle with herdsmen here. At times, they would put their cows on our farms and when you try to talk, it becomes another thing. It's only God that has been helping us, but the herdsmen here are treating us badly. So, if the government can deploy security personnel to guide the communities that are faced with this insecurity, it will be over because the herdsmen hate to see soldiers. They don't misbehave with people when soldiers are around. But when they observe that soldiers have gone back to their headquarters, they begin to invade again. It is only once in a while that you see soldiers going around the various communities that have the issue of insecurity on patrol.

What kind of support has your family received in dealing with this tragic event?

We haven't received any support from the community, only from our family and relatives.

What are your expectations from the government regarding your brother's death?

Honestly, I am not expecting any action from the government. We haven't got any report from the government. I don't think they will do anything.

What support do you need in the community?

Those security personnel in the local government headquarters should be posted to the various communities suffering insecurity. If the government can do this, security will be tight and we can move freely.



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