

Abia murder suspect flees police custody, grieving family seeks justice

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| By Uthman Salami

The grieving family of Mazi Ezuma Ukwu, whose teenage son, Chinedu, was said to have been fatally stabbed on April 3, 2024, in the Arochukwu area of Abia State by three suspected members of a cult group, has expressed concern over the suspect's escape from police custody.

The bereaved family of the 18-year-old boy, who was brutally killed for refusing to be inducted into the cult group, told our correspondent that they needed assistance from the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, to bring his alleged killers to justice.

According to the information made available to our correspondent by some family members of the deceased, the victim was returning home along with his twin brother and a cousin when the gang accosted them and started harassing and assaulting Chinedu.

While his twin brother and cousin attempted to protect him and stop the group from assaulting the deceased, *PUNCH Metro* learnt that they (the suspects) took out some weapons from a bag pack they brought along to further harass Chinedu.

Fearing for his life, *PUNCH Metro* learnt from the family that the victim took to his heel but that his alleged assailants gave him a hot chase along the hilly road with a motorcycle. They were believed to have ridden to the area and used the motorcycle to knock him down.

The family said before he could regain his balance, one of the suspects had broken a bottle that was filled up with wine and stuck it in the victim's neck, while other members of the group allegedly stabbed him in the head and shoulders with the same broken bottle.

The victim's mother, Madam Agaodi, said in a telephone interview with *PUNCH Metro* on Wednesday, "The IPO from Umuahia called me. She told me that one of the suspects had escaped from prison.

"This is despite all our efforts to move the case out of Arochukwu, where the incident occurred, to Umuahia, the state capital. Out of the three boys who brutally killed my son, only two were arrested. I was shocked when the police said one of the two suspects arrested had escaped from prison.

"I was inside my shop at about 8 p.m. when one of his friends with blood stains all over him came to tell me that I should follow him to see what was happening. I asked him what happened, but he insisted I should follow him.

"My husband and I left the shop on a motorcycle. But when we got to the front of our house, I saw almost half of the community in front of our house. I quickly moved in to see what was happening. Then, I saw my son lying down in the pool of his blood. I couldn't believe my eyes," she recounted to our correspondent.

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The bereaved mother told *PUNCH Metro* that even though the police arrested one of the suspects the night of the incident, it was the local vigilante group that arrested the second suspect; both were subsequently handed over to the police in Arochukwu by family members.

The victim's uncle, Mmere Ukwu, who was at the village when the incident happened, told our correspondent that the pains of the entire family had become worse after the officer investigating the matter in Umuahia informed them that the alleged prime suspect had escaped from police detention.

He said, "He was my cousin. I travelled home with my family. One of my friends was doing a service of songs in the church. I was there with my wife when his twin brother rushed down to meet us in the church to tell us that Chinedu was dying. When we left to see what was happening, we met the lifeless body of Chinedu. There were deep cuts on his head, shoulders, and neck.

"They broke wine bottle on his head before stabbing him to death. We called the police, who then came to take pictures and take the body to the mortuary. We mobilised the police so that the suspects could be arrested. One of them was nabbed that night. And the local vigilantes gathered to arrest the prime suspect. And he started begging, saying that he didn't know that he was going to die.

"To avoid the case being muddled up by the division, we took the two suspects to the State CID in Umuahia, where we thought the police would do things properly. Unfortunately, we started hearing stories that one of the boys had escaped from custody. How can he escape from the state headquarters of the police?"

Ukwu, however, called on relevant authorities to help in seeking justice and prevent the matter from being swept under the carpet.

When contacted by our correspondent on Wednesday, the Abia State Police Public Relations Officer, Maureen Chinaka, confirmed the escape of the suspect, stating that efforts were ongoing to 're-apprehend the suspect'.

"With regard to the information you requested, we are aware (of the escape) and efforts are ongoing to pick up the suspect. Efforts are ongoing to re-apprehend the suspect; we are not going to start something that we will not finish. With time, we will arrest the suspect," she said.

In March, a final-year student at the Abia State University, Emmanuel Uche, was shot dead by some suspected cultists.

The State Police Command, in a statement later, confirmed the arrest of one Emmanuel Victor for the alleged murder.