

Trigger-happy cop throws pregnant wife, aged parents into mourning killing bread winner jostling for petrol

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| By Godfrey George

•NNPC Obalende, scene of the incident

GODFREY GEORGE writes about the killing of a 43-year-old man by a policeman and how the ongoing scarcity of petrol in Nigeria is not only taking a toll on the lives of Nigerians but has also revealed a fatal dimension

Dark clouds of mourning have settled on the roof of the Eniafes' after their son, Toheeb, was snuffed out by a policeman on Wednesday. A bright and sunny day became a day of mourning as the young man was gunned down and left to bleed to death on the premises of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited fuel station, where he had gone to buy petrol for his personal use.

Petrol has become gold for weeks across Nigeria due to scarcity and an exorbitant pump price where it is available. Nigerians have been made to queue and wait for petrol like people waiting for Godot.

Many leave their homes in the morning and get the product after several hours of queuing, arguing and fighting over whose turn it is to buy the product.

This is as acute petrol supply challenges enter its third week.

With independent marketers, under the Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria, explaining that issues that led to the scarcity of the product would take another two weeks to be fully resolved, queues have become a regular sight from Abuja to Ekiti and down to Lagos.

The Public Relations Officer of IPMAN, Chief Chinedu Ukadike, who said the product was not available in-country, blamed the acute shortage in supply of importation bottlenecks and the slow pace of marketers' licence renewal by the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority,.

He disclosed that only 1,050 marketers out of 15,000 had had their licences renewed by the NMDPRA.

“The situation is that there is no product. Once there is a lack of or inadequate supply, you will see scarcity and queues will emerge at filling stations. On the part of NNPC, which is the sole supplier of petroleum products in Nigeria, they have attributed the challenge to logistics and vessel problems.

“The NNPC group CEO has assured us that there will be improvement in the supply chain because their vessels are arriving. Once that is done, normalcy will return; this is because once the 30-day supply sufficiency is distrusted. It takes two to three months to restore it. We expect that by next week or so, NNPC should be able to restore supply and within another week, normalcy should return” he said.

In a now-viral video that surfaced on X last weekend, a filling station belonging to a major oil marketer and said to be located in the Igando area of Lagos was called out for allegedly compelling customers to purchase meat pies before fuel would be sold to them.

The video shows several customers with jerry cans and another buyer in an SUV waiting for their turn to get fuel.

A man could be heard in the video complaining about what he described as an unusual situation.

He said, “How on earth will I be asked to buy meat pie before I buy fuel? What sort of rubbish is this? Is this place open for meat pie or for fuel?

The attendant remonstrated with the man for recording the video while a lady dressed in a black dress, who appeared to be affiliated with the station, advised him to “go and eat”.

The video immediately generated outrage from many netizens who condemned the actions of the filling station.

Emergency intervention

As fuel scarcity continues to bite harder in different locations, the Federal Government said it had begun a 15-day emergency fuel supply to ensure the commodity circulates across the length and breadth of the country.

The government also disclosed that vessels importing Premium Motor Spirit would continue to berth at the shore to discharge petrol to different depots, from where the product would be distributed to different filling stations.

The Major Energies Marketers Association of Nigeria had in a statement on Tuesday said its members in Apapa and other locations in Lagos had been receiving 300 million litres of fuel from eight vessels this week.

This was after the South-West Regional Coordinator of the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority, Ayo Cardoso, confirmed to one of our correspondents that aside from the 240 million litres offloaded at various depots on Monday, close to 85 million litres of petrol were offloaded as of Tuesday evening.

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However, *The PUNCH* observed on Wednesday that the queues in filling stations had yet to subside, even as workers marked May Day.

As of Wednesday afternoon, it was observed that the few filling stations where the fuel was available sold at prices considered to be too exorbitant.

It was on this day that Toheeb lost his life.

The 43-year-old man, who lived with his parents at the Dolphin Estate in the Ikoyi area of the state, was a member of the residents' association of the area and had gone out to get the product and also regulate the traffic in the area.

Little did he know that he would not make it back home to see his ageing mother and father.

When our correspondent got to the scene, two burnt vehicles were sighted. The place was unusually quiet, as the area is known for its noise and bustle, playing host to many motor parks and Bus Rapid Transit stations.

However, as the smoke from the vehicles filled the air, it choked life out of the once-busy area, causing residents to walk quietly as though avoiding the obvious tragedy.

Some persons were seen pointing at the areas, talking under their breaths and clicking their fingers in the popular Nigerian 'God-forbid-bad-thing' fashion.

Our correspondent gathered from residents that Eniafe was in the queue to get petrol when the incident happened.

While in the queue, two men, believed to be military officers, attempted to drive into the station to buy petrol, though they were not originally in the queue to get the product.

When confronted, they claimed to have the authorisation to go in.

Many in the queue lamented that they had been waiting for hours to get petrol, adding that it would be unfair for some people to just drive in and jump the queue.

The security agents' attempt, our correspondent learnt, was met with stiff resistance from people in the queue. Several eyewitnesses confirmed that Eniafe and a few other men who also joined to control traffic, spearheaded the argument, telling the men to join the queue like everyone else.

This further degenerated into a fisticuff and the eventual death of the young man after one of the men shot him and fled the scene.

A resident, who gave his name as Mr Amos and said he witnessed the incident, alleged that the officers were from the Department of State Services as they had branded polo shirts.

Ayo narrated, “I saw them; they are men of the DSS. They came to the scene to buy fuel but refused to join the queue. That is what they always do. It was not Toheeb’s turn yet but he confronted them, asking them to join the queue or be polite about the way they went about the purchase.

“One of them was so impatient. He slapped Toheeb and he retaliated with more words. Before we could know it, we heard gunshots and Toheeb fell to the ground.”

A woman, who said she was clearing up her stand where she sold alcoholic bitters close to the station but refused to give her name for security reasons, told our correspondent that she heard the gunshot at about 9:30 p.m. and fled the scene.

She said, “I did not even wait to see what was happening. I ran as fast as I could before any stray bullet would hit me. But, I heard from the people who were there that it was two soldiers.

“They are not policemen. One shot the young man and ran away. I learnt they caught one but he still managed to escape eventually.”

Also speaking, a young man who gave his name as Capo told *Saturday PUNCH* that he knew the deceased.

“This place (Obalende) is very small. Everybody knows everybody. Toheeb stays in the Dolphin Estate area. He is a Muslim. He was supposed to be buried shortly after he died but his body has been taken by the police to the morgue for investigation and possibly an autopsy,” he added.

Asked whether he was at the scene of the crime, Capo said, “Of course, I was there. I saw it with my own eyes. We were the ones who pursued the men that committed the crime but one of them shot in the air and people ran away.

That was the way he could escape.

“One hid under a bus so we set it on fire. He also ran away. We initially thought they were policemen but they are not; I can tell you that for free. Just imagine how they have taken the life of that young man now for nothing.”

Another young man, who said he worked with a marketing firm in the area but refused to give his name because of his safety, also confirmed the incident.

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“I was at Obalende. I was coming back from work. I can tell you that the shooter is not a policeman but a DSS officer who came to buy fuel but was stopped by Toheeb and his friends.

“They told him (the security agent) that he must join the queue. The man, from what I learnt, told them that the manager was aware of his coming but Toheeb and some other men refused him entry.

“Some guys in the area broke a bottle and were about to attack the officer during the argument and that was when the shots were fired, and they ran away,” he said.

Efforts by our correspondent to reach the branch manager of the station to speak were abortive, as his staff members said he was not around and that no one was authorised to speak on his behalf.

However, one of the workers, whom our correspondent convinced to speak, said military officers, veterans and the aged were given preferential treatment during fuel purchases.

“Whenever there is a scarcity like this, we prioritise military men and the like; that is one thing Nigerians need to know. Our manager was aware they were coming and told us to open the gate for them but the people in the queue were just not cooperative.

“The other time there was scarcity, we even dedicated a particular pump for senior citizens, soldiers and other essential workers because they cannot be made to queue up like others. That is how these things work. It is an

unwritten rule,” the employee stated.

Policeman responsible for Toheeb’s death – Lagos PPRO

However, the spokesperson of the Lagos State Police Command, SP Benjamin Hundeyin, said the man was shot dead by a policeman serving with the command during a scuffle on whose turn it was to buy petrol.

The spokesperson for the DSS, Peter Afunnaya, also dismissed the claim that the Toheeb was killed by a DSS operative.

Afunnaya, responding to an enquiry by our correspondent, wrote, “It is not true (that a DSS officer shot Toheeb). Kindly deepen your investigations to uncover the truth. No single DSS staff (member) was involved in the matter.”

Hundeyin had earlier said the identity of the killer had yet to be known, as investigations were ongoing, but in a swift turn of events, on Thursday evening, in a post on *X*, noted that it was a cop serving at the Special Protection Unit, Base 17, Lion Building, Lagos who shot and killed Toheeb.

He wrote, “The person behind the shooting has been identified as a police officer serving at Special Protection Unit, Base 17, Lion Building, Lagos. An investigation is still ongoing and further findings will be made available.

“Meanwhile, the Lagos State Police Command is working with the family of the deceased to ensure that there is no miscarriage of justice.”

Who will raise Toheeb’s unborn child?

A friend of Toheeb, who said he wanted to be identified only as Mr Hakeem, while mourning Toheeb, said the deceased man left a pregnant wife and aged parents. He also noted that the mother of the deceased went into deep shock and had refused to eat since she heard the news of her son’s death.

Hakeem said, “It is still like a dream for me. It was announced on TV that someone died but we did not know it was Toheeb. The way I heard of it was the way his parents also heard of it.

“The old woman (Toheeb’s mother) has not been able to eat. Toheeb was everything to us. We were even scared to tell his pregnant wife, not knowing that she read it in the news. It is heartbreaking for us. What will happen to his family? Who will raise his unborn child?”

Another friend of the deceased, Ola Quest, expressed sadness over the tragedy in a post on *Facebook*.

“It is with great sadness that I post this and I am hurting right now. I drove through this chaos last night on my way home after leaving work. I was even the one who told the driver to avoid driving through the fracas. Unknown to me, it was a friend that was killed in the melee.

“We practically grew up together and I have been in shock since noon. You need to know this great guy to appreciate what a soul is lost. Just to tell you how great a person he is. An elderly woman who heard the news of his death last night also died from the shock,” he stated.

Also calling for justice, a human rights campaigner, Adeyemi Ibrinke, said, “This young man’s blood is in the hands of President Bola Tinubu, Mele Kyari and other politicians responsible for this scarcity. It is also in the hands of every crazy law enforcement/military personnel and their selfish private sector collaborators. Nigerians have no business suffering like this.”

Nigeria’s menace of trigger-happy cops

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed several incidents of unlawful killing of civilians by policemen. These incidents have led to loss of lives, injuries, and widespread public outcry, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive police reform and accountability measures. Toheeb is not the only victim.

One such case occurred on April 29, 2023, in Lagos, when a policeman shot and killed a young man during a routine stop-and-search operation. Eyewitnesses reported that the victim, a 25-year-old artisan named Yusuf

Ibrahim, was unarmed and compliant with the cop's instructions when he was fatally shot at close range.

The incident sparked outrage and protests in the community, with residents demanding justice for Yusuf and the prosecution of the policeman responsible.

Another tragic incident occurred on July 17, 2022, in Abuja, where a policeman opened fire on a group of peaceful protesters, resulting in the death of two demonstrators and injuries for several others. The protesters were peacefully advocating for better governance and an end to police brutality when they were met with excessive force by law enforcement agents.

The incident drew condemnation from civil society groups and international organisations, calling for a transparent investigation and prosecution of the officers involved.

Similarly, on September 5, 2021, in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, a policeman shot and injured a motorist during a routine traffic stop.

The victim, a 35-year-old father of two named Emeka Okonkwo, sustained gunshot wounds to his leg after allegedly failing to comply with the policeman's demands.

The incident raised concerns about the use of disproportionate force by some policemen in routine encounters with citizens and highlighted the need for improved training and oversight within the Force.

A lawyer, Mr Chibuike Onwuka, said the prevalence of trigger-happy security agents posed a grave threat to the safety and security of citizens, eroding trust in law enforcement and undermining the rule of law.

"There must be swift and impartial investigations into all cases of police shootings, with officers found guilty of misconduct held accountable through appropriate disciplinary and legal action. Furthermore, the Nigerian government must prioritise the welfare and well-being of law enforcement officers, ensuring they are adequately trained, equipped, and supported to carry out their duties professionally and responsibly.

"Only through concerted efforts to reform the police can Nigeria effectively address the scourge of police brutality and restore public trust in law enforcement," he added.

On X, a user, @Abikhay1, said policemen should be banned from holding guns on the streets.

Another X user, a lawyer, @realTgLaw, wrote, "What a country! Some of our uniformed men need to be checked. How can someone recruited by the government to help ensure the safety of lives and properties be the one killing the same lives he is recruited to protect?"

Another lawyer based in Rivers State, Mrs Selena Onuoha, said the consequences of police brutality were dire and far-reaching.

“Lives are lost, families are torn apart, and the fabric of society is frayed. Yet, despite the outcry and outrage that follows each senseless killing, the perpetrators often escape accountability, shielded by a broken system that fails to deliver justice.

“We cannot afford to turn a blind eye to this grave injustice. Families who have lost loved ones at the hands of trigger-happy policemen deserve more than empty promises and hollow condolences. They deserve justice – swift, transparent, and uncompromising. It is incumbent upon the authorities to hold accountable those responsible for these heinous acts and to ensure that they face the full force of the law,” Onuoha said.

She also noted that discipline within the police force is paramount.

She added, “Officers entrusted with the power to uphold the law must be held to the highest standards of conduct and integrity. There can be no room for impunity or abuse of authority.

“Those who betray the public trust and violate the rights of citizens must be swiftly removed from the ranks of law enforcement and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

Similarly, a social rights campaigner, Mr Endiong John, stated that the fight against police brutality was not just a legal or moral imperative but a fundamental human right.

He said, “Every citizen has the right to live free from fear of arbitrary violence or abuse at the hands of those sworn to protect them. When that trust is betrayed, when innocent lives are cut short by the reckless actions of trigger-happy policemen, it is incumbent upon all of us to stand up and demand justice.

“In the face of adversity, we must remain steadfast in our pursuit of accountability and reform. We must demand transparency, accountability, and justice for the victims of police brutality. Only then can we begin to heal the wounds inflicted by these senseless acts of violence and build a society where the rights and dignity of every citizen are respected and upheld.”