

Family suspects foul play as NNPC cleaner dies inside facility

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Rivers CP, Olatunji Disu

By Dennis Naku

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The family of 23-year-old Asher Christopher has called for a thorough investigation into circumstances surrounding his death inside the Nigerian National Petroleum Company office building located along Moscow Road, Port Harcourt, on Tuesday, August 20, 2024.

Father of the deceased, Dan Christopher, said he was shocked that up till now, he had not seen the corpse of his son, who he said was a cleaner and casual worker with the company.

Christopher while speaking with newsmen in Port Harcourt on Thursday, said his younger son put a call across to him at about 4:15 pm on Tuesday that a colleague of Asher called him that he should come to the police station at Old GRA, that they needed him.

The father stated, "I asked what happened. My son said he didn't know. When I got there, I asked Asher where they had searched, but they did not see my son's name on the list at the police station. I had to ask my son, who called me to his brother's (Asher's) colleague again. He now called the person to find out if it was the Old GRA Police Station, and he said we should come or go elsewhere.

"The person said I should come to the surveillance office upstairs at the Old GRA Police Station. I waited till 7 pm, and one of the policewomen told me to come back on Wednesday.

"On Wednesday, the police told me my son was dead. So, they took my wife and me along with other people to the company (NNPC) on Moscow Road where he was working as a cleaner. So, I asked where my son fell from. They said nobody really knew if he fell from the second, third, fourth, seventh or last floor.

"I asked them what the boy looked like. They said he wasn't wearing a shirt. So, I asked them to show me the place. They showed me the place, and I took pictures. I looked at the place, and there was no sign that somebody had fallen from there."

The distraught man said the spot looked like something. Somebody used metal to break the pipe, during which he asked them to tell him what had happened before the boy fell.

He added, “I asked for his clothes, and they said nobody had seen them. When I got to the first floor, I saw the boy’s slippers together with the clothes. My son was a cleaner in this company. I snapped it and told them I wanted to see the boy’s corpse to confirm if it was my son or not.

“The police took us back to the mortuary, but did not allow me to see my son in the mortuary.

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“I want justice. I want to see my son’s corpse. How can somebody die and over 24 hours the parents have not seen him? How can they take my son to the mortuary without consulting his family?

When contacted, the spokesperson for the state police command, Grace Iringe-Koko, confirmed the incident, saying the investigation into the matter had commenced.

She stated, “Yes, we are aware of the incident. The family reported the matter at the Old GRA Police Station. The corpse of the boy has been deposited at the mortuary, and investigation is ongoing to ascertain the circumstances surrounding his death.”

Meanwhile, a rights group, the Centre for Basic Rights Protection and Accountability Campaign, has called for a thorough investigation into the matter to ascertain what really happened.

The National Coordinator, Prince Wiro, queried why the incident was not reported to the Central Police Station in charge of the jurisdiction by the company.

Wiro called on the state Commissioner of Police, Olatunji Disu, to wade into the incident by ordering the transfer of the case file to the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department, Port Harcourt, saddled with the responsibility of investigating culpable homicide.

He added, “We have met with the parents of the deceased. We demand a thorough investigation into what led to the death of the young man.

“We are wondering why the matter was reported to a surveillance unit inside Old GRA that is suspected not to be under the Rivers State Police Command.

“We use this medium to call on the Rivers State Police Commissioner, Olatunji Disu, to wade into this matter and direct that the case file be transferred to the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department for thorough investigation.