

## interview

# How Abuja one-chance syndicate killed my sister— Ghanaian cinematographer

*Forty-nine-year-old Ghanaian cinematographer, Arnold Armong, narrates to AJIBADE OMAPE the circumstances surrounding the death of his sister, Freda Armong, who was abducted and mercilessly beaten by a one-chance syndicate in Abuja*

**C**an you briefly tell us how related you are to the deceased?

I'm the elder brother of Freda Armong, the one-chance victim. We have been in Nigeria, precisely Abuja, since 2006. We are from Ghana. My sister is a businesswoman, while I am in the IT industry. I teach, and I'm also a media person. I am a cinematographer, so I am also in the media space. My sister was 45 years old, and I am 49 years old.

**How did you hear about the unfortunate incident?**

On July 1st, it was just like a normal day. I think I was editing a video at home around 11 pm when I got a call from my in-law in Canada, that my sister had an issue at the hospital. I was told she was going home when she entered a one-chance vehicle.

My in-law asked me not to panic, because she was in stable condition. I was curious how he got to know. When the incident happened, I think the vigilante who picked my sister up by the roadside around the stadium area went through the contact she had written in a book.

It happened that her boss's phone number was there. So, they called her boss, who then called my in-law in Canada, and my in-law called me. That was how I got to hear about the matter.

**What was your initial reaction when you heard about it?**

So, because my in-law had told me that my sister was in stable condition, I did not panic; I was calm, although I knew the severity of the situation because a month earlier, a colleague of mine had suffered the same fate, where everything was collected from her and she was also severely beaten. She survived it. So, I wasn't too bothered; I was thinking everything would be okay.

**Can you tell us how the rest of your family heard about what happened to Freda on July 1st, and how they reacted to it?**

So, because Dad is late and my mum is very emotional, I did not say anything to her. My younger brother is in Ghana with her, but I did not say anything because I knew what the reaction would have been, and we were thinking that my sister would be well, although some other members of our family who were not resident in Africa knew.

So, we decided not to tell them until Freda got well and was able to tell the story, but that wasn't to be. When Freda was taken to the ICU after three days, when she was having complications, I then informed my younger brother, and even warned him not to tell my mum, because it might cause a little bit of friction. We were hopeful that she would be okay.

But after two days in the ICU, when she passed on, we had no choice but to let her know. But I wouldn't be the right person to do that, so we informed the elders at home to go and tell my mum about the unfortunate incident that had just taken place.

Of course, you know the reaction of a mother who has an only girl in her family. When the news was broken to her, she couldn't take it. She had to sleep over at the hospital because her BP was high, and things were happening in her body, so she had to sleep at the hospital and come home the next day.

**Freda was reportedly abducted around 7:00 pm and found near midnight. Was it unusual that she had not returned home, and did the family try to locate her during that period before hearing of the incident?**

She doesn't come home late. When she goes out, maybe when she goes to church, when church closes, she's at

home. She doesn't stay out. My sister is not that social a person like that.

Either she goes for her business meetings and comes home, or goes to church and comes back home. She doesn't stay late, so it was unusual for us not to see her after 7 pm, then 8, 9, 10 pm, and it went on and on. It was unusual.

**Did your sister have any immediate red flag that could have prevented her from boarding that particular vehicle?**

I think the red flag would have been seeing two men at the back, and you still entered the vehicle. But mind you, maybe it has happened before, so from the benefit of hindsight, you know that it's not harmful to just enter a car when you see two men, because maybe consistently, you have taken vehicles where there were two men and nothing happened.

**Did she narrate all of this to you before she passed on?**

Yes, she did. It was not conjecture. I did not guess those things.

**You said that X-rays and scans revealed multiple broken posterior ribs, lung lacerations, kidney damage, internal bleeding and injuries to her eyes and heart. Do you think these injuries were the cause of her death, or do you think she died from the trauma or something else?**

I think she died from the injuries. I don't think it was the trauma. It was the injury because her body was broken. It was not the trauma.

**You mentioned that Freda's only 'crime' was living in a beautiful city with a broken system. What specific aspects of the system do you believe failed her the most?**

We all know that the first duty of the government is to secure its people. If you can't secure your people, then it's as good as not having a government. So, when you are living in a beautiful city and you cannot be secure, it's like the ostrich that hides its head in the sand, and its whole body is outside and

thinking it's hiding. It's not.

Our politicians are busy defecting and moving to different parties, while the masses are suffering and are being killed, and they don't know where to run to.

So, while the politicians are doing their thing, the

doing this job very nicely, but we have some people in the police who are not supposed to be there.

I don't know why you bring crude, unpolished vagabonds into the police. I don't think you should have people like that in the police. They pretend to work while the government pretends to pay them. So, that is just it.

**Has any investigation begun, and has it yielded results?**

To the best of my knowledge, they have not started anything. Maybe they have started, but I have not been told. But judging from what I saw at the station, I can confidently say they have not even started.

I didn't personally report the matter; it was my sister's boss who reported the matter, because the Ghana Embassy is involved. So, they reported the matter and moved the case to the FCT headquarters.

**What role has the Ghana Embassy played since this incident took place?**

They've played a very key role. They are on the matter. I think they've written to the Foreign Affairs Ministry, they've written to people who matter in this country too. So, they've written to the relevant agencies to look into the matter.

**How did the news of her abduction and death affect her husband and children?**

My sister is not married, and she has never been married.

**How has Freda's death impacted your family emotionally and financially?**

It has affected a lot because it is not easy to treat a patient who has been battered and beaten. Medical supplies and medical consumables are very expensive, especially when it has to do with organs, internal bleeding and all.

The consumables you need to solve those problems are very expensive. So, if you don't have money and you have a problem like that, the patient will just die the same day the patient goes to the hospital. We spent a whole lot of money. We lost count of what we spent.

**What immediate steps would you like to see the government or transport regulators take to ensure commercial vehicles are safer for commuters?**

There should be a formal identification and verification system for every vehicle. Then we should know the identity of every driver. Anytime you enter a public transport vehicle, it's like you have been blindfolded and asked to go home. That's what it means.

When you are blindfolded and asked to cross the road, it's dangerous. That's what it means, because I don't know the driver and the vehicle. Anybody can paint any vehicle and put it on the road.

Instead of transport unions fighting among themselves and scampering for positions and brutalising drivers on the road, I think they should divert their attention to where their members will be able to be verified by the public.

Our agencies responsible for road safety should also come up with ideas that will make transportation services safe for everybody. You can't just register a vehicle without knowing the person. At times, you register the person, and the person doesn't have a NIN or a driver's licence. Then you allow them to drive. These things will keep happening if you don't take steps to address them.

**As a foreigner who has been in Nigeria for years, would you say you are disappointed in the system?**

Well, it's a yes and no answer. The system itself, I would be a hypocrite if I sit here and say that the system has never helped me, and that would be telling a lie. The system has also helped me, and the system has disappointed me.

So, I will not sit here and say that the system is a total disappointment, no. There have been a few failures here and there. But the disappointment, I believe, outweighs the advantages.



citizens are also suffering. Everything failed my sister; security, transportation, because I believe that when you are building a system, you must make it foolproof.

Even if it's not 100%, you must make it foolproof. I don't understand why in a city like this, you don't have a good transportation system; you don't know how to identify drivers and vehicles.

I can comfortably drive through this city with two different number plates on my vehicle, and nothing will happen. I have been in this city since 2006, and I think I fairly know the in and out of this city.

If I want to beat the system, I know exactly how to beat the system. I am a Ghanaian who is law-abiding.

**Did you report the incident to the police, and how would you describe the police response?**

Yes, I reported to the police, and let me be straightforward. We reported to the local police station at Maitama. So, because there was an interest in the case, they moved the case to the FCT CID Police. Then we were taken to an office.

I think the head of the police there just said, 'Oh, this is an unfortunate incident.' He minuted on the case file and transferred it to another unit. We went to the unit, and we narrated the thing.

But I didn't see urgency. It was like we have been immune to death, we've heard death several times, so this is just one of those things that happen every day. Their body language, lackadaisical attitude and all. They were sitting relaxed.

Nothing emotional; the urgency with which they ask you for money to do things is quicker than the way they responded to the complaint. It's just like we've all been immune to death. Today we wake up and terrorists have killed 200, they have killed 100. So, it's something we have heard several times.

So, when terrorists kill 20, and the police are interviewing people, they will say, 'Even this is better, because they only killed 20.' It is as if killing one is better than killing 20. We have some good policemen who are



•Freda Armong