

Ogun schoolboy killed in customs, suspected smuggler chase

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The burnt vehicle. Photo: Johnson Idowu

By Johnson Idowu

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A primary schoolboy, Durotimi Salako, was killed after he was knocked down by a suspected smuggler who was allegedly being chased by some Nigerian Customs Service officers in the Itakoji area of Ipokia Local Government Area, Ogun State.

PUNCH Metro learnt on Wednesday from a source in the community, who requested anonymity, that the incident occurred last Thursday while the pupil was on his way to get his afternoon meal.

The source disclosed that Salako had just returned from school when his parent gave him money to go and get what he would eat.

Our correspondent gathered further that while he was walking by the roadside, a vehicle suspected to be driven by a suspected smuggler, allegedly being chased by some Customs officers rammed into him and knocked him down.

The source alleged that rather than the Customs team rescuing the boy to a hospital for emergency treatment, they continued with the seizure of the rice that the smuggler was carrying in his vehicle.

He noted that due to a lack of urgent medical attention, Salako died at the spot.

Our correspondent learnt that the villagers, upon realising that the boy had died, resorted to setting the smuggler's vehicle ablaze.

The source said, "A tragic incident occurred at Itapakoji, a village along the Ipokia township road in Ipokia last Thursday. A primary schoolboy of about 10 years was going to get his afternoon meal after returning from school, and he was hit by a smuggler's vehicle that was being chased by a customs team.

"When the incident happened, the customs team, rather than take the boy to the hospital, was so concerned about seizing the rice and left the boy alone till he died at the spot.

"The villagers who saw that the boy had died set the smuggler's vehicle ablaze out of anger, but the customs left with the rice."

The source noted that since the incident occurred, the mother of the deceased victim has been devastated, and though they heard that the customs boss in the area intended to visit them, they had not heard from any authority.

"The mother of the boy has been devastated and inconsolable since the incident happened.

"We learnt that the customs may likely visit the family, but nothing has been heard about it," the source noted.

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When contacted for a reaction to the incident, the spokesperson for the Ogun Area 1 Customs Command, Chado Zakari, refuted the claim that the operatives were chasing the smuggler at the time of the incident.

Zakari noted that the team was on a routine patrol of the area when the smuggler sighted them and tried to take an illegal route to avoid arrest.

“What happened was that the officers were on their normal routine patrol when the smuggler saw them. On sighting our Hilux, he was trying to follow a particular road to avoid being seen, and he mistakenly knocked down the boy, who died instantly.

“The villagers were even commending our men, and they did not attack them. Our men were not pursuing him at all. He was the one who was trying to escape when he saw our Hilux.

“When the officers saw that the villagers were angry, they rescued the guy from being lynched, evacuated the rice, and moved both the guy and the rice to the office.”

He, however, concluded that the suspected smuggler had been handed over to the legal department of the command for further action.

Instances of civilians losing their lives to customs and smuggler face-offs, especially in Ogun State, have been a recurring issue.

In October 2024, a bystander lost his life after being hit by a stray bullet when some Nigerian Customs Service officers clashed with smugglers in the Obada Idi-Emi area of Imeko-Afon LGA, Ogun State.

PUNCH Metro had gathered that residents were thrown into panic following repeated gunshots that accompanied the scuffle.

Similarly, on March 11, a suspected smuggler identified as Ofe was killed in a clash between Customs operatives and some smugglers in the Yewa South LGA, Ogun State.

PUNCH Metro had learnt that the smugglers and customs operatives clashed when the latter tried to seize some items suspected to be foreign rice.

The face-off was said to have degenerated into a heated argument, leading to sporadic gunshots and Ofe being hit by a bullet fired by one of the customs officers.

This avoidable loss of lives has continued to raise concerns about the mode of operation of the NCS.