

NEWS PLUS

Anger in Kano

... As man dies in police custody

FROM DESMOND MGBOH, KANO

Was the late Ikenna Ositadima Orabueze, son of a renowned female hotelier in Kano State, an armed robbery suspect at the time he died in the custody of the police? Or was he an innocent, 35-year-old man, who was framed up, serially tortured in cell and murdered by operatives of the state police command's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)?

These are questions for which answers are being sought, not just by the grief-stricken community of non-indigenes in the state whose son was allegedly killed by the police but also by the officers and men of the Nigeria Police in Kano, who have come under internal trial. Inspector General of Police (IGP), Alhaji Muhammadu Dikko Abubakar, has ordered investigations into the case.

The response of the IGP was sequel to a petition of extra-judicial killing launched by family of the deceased in the wake of his death in police custody on June 27, this year. The petition was signed by Mr. Jonathan Nyikyaa, a lawyer, working with the chambers of Okechukwu Nwaeze & Co. in Kano. It was entitled, *A Complaint of Extra Judicial Killing and Torturing to Death of our Client's Son, Ikenna Orabueze (deceased) at the Instance of CSP Kolo, the O/C Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigeria Police Kano State Command for allegedly receiving stolen property to Wit: A Laptop Computer.*

The petition, dated July 3, 2014, was at the instance of the mother of the deceased, Mrs. Joy Ofiaede of No 75, Sarkin Yaki Street, Kano. According to her, she was at her business premises when her son was forcefully arrested on June 17 by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and savagely bundled into a police Hilux van.

The bereaved mother said she was attracted by the noise of the crowd, which came to witness the

unusual arrest of her son, adding that her efforts to find out the reason for her son's arrest yielded no positive fruit, as she was told to come to the office of SARS the following day for details.

She further averred that on her arrival at the SARS office at Bompai, one CSP Kolo, who heads the squad, ordered her detention after extracting a statement from her, adding that she was in detention until the evening of the same day before she regained her freedom.

She stated that she made efforts, through a relative, the following day, to find out the reason her son was detained and to negotiate for his release on bail if possible. She said she was told that her son was arrested for allegedly receiving stolen property, which the police said they had recovered in the course of their search.

"In the process of negotiating the bail, the officers demanded the sum of N2 million, as a precedent to the bail. Upon our client's inability to produce the 'bail' sum, the officers on the orders of O/C SARS embarked on a systematic and serial torture of our client's son until he died in the morning of 27th of June, 2014," said the petition.

Arising from the orders of the Inspector-General of Police, investigators from the Zonal Command of the Nigeria Police Force, led by Alhaji Mohammed Yabo, an Assistant Inspector General of Police, have commenced inquiries into the circumstances that resulted in the sudden death of the young man.

On Tuesday, July 15, investigators met with the lawyers of the family, Messrs Okechukwu Nwaeze and Jonathan Nyikyaa, mother of the deceased as well as a former president of the Igbo Community Association (ICA) in the state, Comrade Leonard Nwosu.

Also invited by the Assistant Inspector General of Police to defend the allegations against them were officers of the SARS, led by CSP Kolo. The face-to-face meeting between the alleged killers and the bereaved family was quite

emotional.

Also invited for an interview a day later was Hajia Laila Buhari. The female politician's residence in Kano was raided by suspected armed robbers in February, an incident that flagged off the investigation that resulted in the death of the young man.

On Wednesday, last week, at the Lady Jay Hotel in Sabon Gari, Kano, the younger brother to the deceased, Nnamdi Okeke, told the reporter that his brother was innocent, blaming the SARS officers for his untimely death.

He recalled how their mother was detained the following day for no reason. He lamented that the officers mounted pressure on them to give them N2 million, part of which they stated was to be returned to the owner of the gold that was stolen on the day of the robbery while the rest was to be used as miscellaneous charges.

He pointed out that neither he nor any member of the family was allowed to see the detainee while he was in their custody, adding that his brother was savagely tortured and died a slow and painful death.

"They never allowed me to give him food directly. Rather, some officers would pick it up at the counter and throw it at him in the cell like a dog. It was that bad. They just killed my brother and for no just cause," he lamented. He presented photographs of the deceased taken at the morgue, which showed several marks of torture.

To many people in Kano, the late Ikenna, who was fondly known as Old Iyke, was a good and endearing young man, who repaired laptops and other GSM-related materials along France Road.

On the night of his wake, which took place at 75, Sarkin Yaki Road, Sabon Gari Kano, on July 11, it was a night of sorrow for the youths, who brandished green leaves.

Hundreds of mourners, mostly young persons, defied the downpour and danced in grief round the city over his death.

But a few days later, SARS operatives, through the Police



• The late Ikenna

Public Relations Officer, ASP Magaji Majiya, strongly argued that the deceased was a suspected armed robber, contrary to the perception of many.

The police told our correspondent that the late Ikenna did not participate in the robbery at the residence of Hajia Laila Buhari, adding that he was only a receiver of property stolen from the residence, including handsets, Ipad, and expensive gold coins, among others.

But they said they had proof that he had participated in previous robberies in the state. They also presented armed robbery suspects, who were willing to testify their links with the deceased.

According to the police, when they picked up a prime suspect in the robbery at UDB Road, they realised the similarity in the operational style between that particular case and several robbery cases that had happened in the state in the past.

For this reason, they decided to dig deeper. The result, they stated, was enormous, leading to the arrest of about 26 robbery suspects, who were picked up from several states around Kano. They were certain that the deceased was a part of one or two of the robbery cases, following their investigation.

They further explained that they picked up the late Ikenna after he was identified, as the receiver of the stolen property, adding that after the arrest of the prime suspect, Ikenna made several calls to him not knowing that at the time, he was already under investigation. They allowed the phone calls to continue for days, before they moved in on him.

According to the police, "on the night of the 18th of June, we decided to go and pick up Ikenna, getting the prime suspect to inform him that he had fresh property to sell to him."

"The suspect called him, described the vehicle he would come with and they agreed to a meeting point for the deal. The late Ikenna asked him to meet him at

Lady Jay Hotel where they usually met. Unknown to Ikenna, the police were there in plain clothes and with a second vehicle, as back up to the one that the prime suspect was driving.

"The late Ikenna later came out to meet with him, after he had done several checks to ensure the suspect was alone, including asking him to sit on top of the bonnet of the car. It was then that the police rounded him up.

"But immediately he identified that one of the officers was from SARS, he removed his phone from his pocket, broke it, chewed the SIM card and the memory card and some part of the panel. This led to a struggle between the deceased and the police, who tried to retrieve the phone from his possession."

The police alleged that Ikenna, upon interrogation, confessed to have received some of the stolen items, admitting that he had sold the Ipad but still had the computer with him. The police said he later took them to recover the stolen computer.

They argued that they never tortured the deceased while he was in their custody, as alleged by his family and insisted that he died of the chemicals associated with the SIM card and the memory card, which he chewed and swallowed on the day he was arrested.

According to them, a few days after he was taken in, he started passing watery faeces and vomiting, pointing out that on two occasions, the deceased was taken to the hospital. He was said to have died on the third visit to the Murtala Mohammed Hospital in Kano.

But lawyers to the complainants are not buying the story. They said in law, the evidence of the armed robbery suspects with which they were indicting the deceased amounts to nothing.

"It is until the co-suspect is either convicted or is discharged before the court can rely on his evidence," said one of the lawyers. To him, SARS quickly came up with these stories because the accused is a dead man that cannot defend himself.