

An old man's agony : How Rivers police murdered my son

— 26th June 2017

•Family demands justice, petitions CP, IGP

From **Okey Sampson**, Aba

On November 10, 2016, Cosmos Ukenna, a 38-year-old auto mechanic, left home for his workshop at Rumuibekwe Estate in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. He could never have suspected that he would not return to the house alive.

Ukenna, the first son of Mr. Celestine Ukenna Iwuchukwu from Eziagbogu, Ezinihitte Mbaise in Imo State, allegedly lost his life after a severe battering in the hands of some policemen.

His father, Pa Iwuchukwu, 70, said some policemen from the Okporo Police Station in Port Harcourt were involved in his son's murder. He gave the name of one of the policemen as Sergeant Musa.

The septuagenarian said he was told that on November 10, last year, Abuchi Amadi and Kelechi Agba, auto mechanics and neighbours to Cosmos, were employed by an unknown man to fix his car in front of their workshop at Rumuibekwe Estate by Shell Gate in Port Harcourt. The owner reportedly left the car with the mechanics and promised to return later.

Soon after, Sergeant Musa, who was on guard at a nearby company, allegedly left his duty post and accosted the mechanics, informing them that the car was stolen. The reporter learnt that Musa thereafter tied the mechanics' wrists with ropes and started beating them.

"As the beating was going on, Cosmos, who knew the three men, advised the policeman to take the two men to the police station pending when the man who brought the car would come. But the advice infuriated the policemen. He lifted Cosmos up and brutally smashed his head against the ground three times. Cosmos then lost consciousness," the elderly man said.

Detention

Sergeant Musa was said to have handcuffed the unconscious Cosmos and the two other mechanics, forced them into the boot of his car and dumped them first at Miniokporo Police Station from where they were transferred to the State Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) office without bail from November 10 to November 16, 2016. Cosmos, it was gathered, never got any medical attention.

According to the deceased's father, efforts by the family to get Cosmos released on bail to take him to hospital for treatment were rebuffed by the investigating police officer, one Inspector Bright, and the DCO of Okporo Division, Ihudum Fredrick, a Superintendent of Police. Ironically, when Cosmos's spiralled, the two police officers were said to have demanded N100,000 before he could be admitted to bail.

Death in police cell

On November 16, 2016, when it became obvious that Cosmos might die in custody, the police officers allegedly invited his family to come and take him on bail.

Said Pa Iwuchukwu: "When my younger son called to inform me that the police had invited us, I asked him whether I should start coming to Port Harcourt from Owerri. But he said he would come to collect money with which to bail him from the police station. The following day, my younger son, Chinasa, came to Owerri and I gave him N30,000 and he went back to Port Harcourt.

"But the following day, Saturday, he called to inform me that before he could get to the police station where my son was kept at Okporo, that the policemen there had taken him to the SARS people. He said his health condition was pathetic.

“On Monday, Chinasa called me on phone again to inform me that my son, his elder brother, had died in the cell of the SARS people. My younger brother, Dominic Ukenna, who is a policeman, when he heard the news, came and together we went to Port Harcourt. When we got to the police station, they took us to the mortuary where my son’s corpse was deposited and behold it was true, my first son and only hope was dead.”

Another encounter with police

Cosmos’s father said he also had an encounter with the police at Okporo Division over his son’s death: “After seeing the corpse of my son at the mortuary, I went with my younger brother, Dominic, to Okporo Police Station and asked them what killed my son. They told me they did not beat him. They told me he was sick before he was put inside the cell. I asked them again whether it was prudent of them to have taken a sick person, assuming he was sick as they claimed, inside the cell instead of the hospital. The police could not answer that question. Instead, the police brought out the N30,000 my younger son gave them for his elder brother’s bail. They brought out the money in an envelope and gave my younger brother, Dominic Ukenna, the policeman.

“My younger brother said no, that he was not going to accept the money back, that since they were still with his brother’s son, they should hold the money and they collected the money again. My son is still in the mortuary, and those who killed him have not been arrested, even though we lodged a formal complaint at the Okporo Police Station.

“When we met the DPO of Okporo Police Station, she denied ever sending the policemen who were on duty at the nearby Oilserv Company to arrest the deceased, which meant they were on illegal duty at that material time.”

Corroborating what his father said, Chinasa Ukenna said Musa had been walking free since the incident. He said when the family was invited by the SCID, Musa was allowed to go in his car: “When I reminded the police that Musa, who is accused of killing my brother, should have been remanded in custody, they said I could not teach them police work.”

The family’s lawyer, D.C. Ebere, on May 17, 2017, wrote a petition to the Rivers State Commissioner of Police. A copy was sent to the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Idris Ibrahim.

In the petition, Ebere chronicled how the policemen treated the deceased as a common criminal despite the fact that he knew nothing about and was not even the one working on the car that was alleged to be stolen.

The petition partly reads: “In the heat of this scene, the deceased was passing by and because he knew both the police officer (Sergeant Musa) and the two mechanics, who were being tied and beaten, he moved to the scene and pleaded with Sergeant Musa to take them to the police station rather than continue with the public show of torture.”

He narrated how Sergeant Musa allegedly turned on Cosmos and battered the deceased until he lost consciousness, after which he took the three mechanics to the Okporo Police Station and later to the SARS office between November 10 and 15.

“Efforts to secure the bail of the deceased (who remained unconscious during this time) by family members were futile as the IPO, Inspector Bright and the DCO of Okporo, SP Ihudum Fredrick, refused to grant bail and later demanded the sum of N100,000 before bail could be granted for the deceased to go for treatment. His death followed his unlawful beating, torture, detention and restraint, as he was tied two hands together with a sponge and left in a small cell to suffocate till he finally died after five days in detention.

“It is our submission that the assault by Sergeant Musa and his colleagues, the continued detention of an unconscious man by both SP Ihudum Fredrick and Inspector Bright, which led to Cosmos’ death are all contrary to the provisions of Section 33(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended).”

The lawyer and the father of the deceased said all the policemen involved should be made to face the law.

Police Public Relations Officer, Rivers State Command, Nnamdi Omoni, said the officers mentioned have denied committing for the alleged offence.

He said the matter was under investigation at the State Criminal Investigation Department, with the assurance tht the report would be out soon.