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Father of 7 tortured to death in police detention

■ I'm yet to believe he's dead –Wife

■ CSOs demand action from Rivers CP Zaki

ony John, Port Harcourt

Wife and siblings of 52-year-old Bekinbo Chima Goodhead are in grief and demanding action from the Rivers State Commissioner of Police, Zaki Ahmed, whose men are alleged to have tortured their breadwinner to death while in police detention at the Mile 1, Police Station, Ikwerre Road, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Equally joined in the quest to obtain justice for the family is a coalition of civil society organizations in the state. Bekinbo died on June 1, 2018 as a result of internal injuries sustained by him the course of the horrible torture allegedly experienced in the hands of policemen.

Meanwhile, the police command in the state has kept mum over the allegations as several attempts to get an official reaction has the so far met a brick wall. However, it was learnt that the police have seized the receipt issued to a member of the family after the body of the deceased was deposited at the mortuary of the military hospital in Port Harcourt.

The road that led to the tragic demise of Bekinbo began after a Rivers State High Court gave judgment in May this year in the matter brought before it in respect of a property that belonged to Chima Goodhead, the late patriarch of the polygamous family.

Sunday Sun learnt that the half-brothers of Bekinbo had stridently refused to accord him recognition as the first son of their late father, despite the clear and declaratory orders made by the court.



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Until his death, Bekinbo was a taxi driver and native of Buguma in Asari-Toru Local Government Area of the State. He was married to Mrs. Nkiru Bekinbo Chima, and the marriage was blessed with seven children, five females and two males: Sandra Bekinbo (21), Precious (17), Lolo (15), Junior (13), Angel (9), Dieprieve (6) and Rejoice, who is just one year and few months old.

Following the death of their father, a squabble arose over the property located at No. 5 Udi Street, Mile 1, Diobu, Port Harcourt. In the midst of the family feud, the mother of the deceased died two years ago and is yet to be buried. The matter of the property became a court case and prolonged legal battle. Then in May this year, the court gave judgment in which it recognized Bekinbo as the first son of Chima Goodhead and therefore vested in him the power to manage the asset.

In what would seem like a vagrant disregard of the court judgment, 40-year-old Ibiye Chima Goodhead, the younger brother of the deceased, told Sunday Sun that their half-brothers refused to accept the decision of the court, which ruled on all issues regarding the building in dispute. They also refused to release the building to Bekinbo to administer on behalf of the whole family.

As Sunday Sun learnt from Ibiye, the antagonism of the half-brothers of the deceased, which had been rumbling like a volcano eventually erupted on June 1, when they were alleged to have conspired with some policemen and had him arrested on the basis of a false accusation.

His words: "On June 1, I was not at home. Somebody called and told me that he saw my half-brothers and sisters beating my elder brother. I found out later that they conspired with some policemen from Mile 1, Police Station.

"I rushed home and saw my brother on the ground. My mother is lying in the mortuary. He was supposed to bury my mother. When they saw me coming, they all ran away. Within five minutes, a team of policemen arrived. They arrested my deceased brother and I. They took us to their station and said we should write a statement. They (policemen) started beating both of us with their batons, especially my brother. They also kicked him all over the body with their boots.

"They called my brother a criminal, and said that he was the one that collected the money. We asked them which money they were talking about. They said it was a criminal matter. I told the policemen that the court had settled everything concerning our father's property. They said that was a different matter. They threw us into the cell after inflicting injuries on us."

Continuing, he said: "Somebody I could not recognize said he paid some money to one of my half brothers.

The person said both of us conspired and collected the money and ejected him later. I told the policemen that my brother and I did not know anything about the accusation. I told the policemen to investigate from other tenants living in the compound. But they shouted at me to shut up.

"Thirty minutes after the torture, my brother started complaining of severe chest pain. I tried to comfort him. Then I tried to call my lawyer with my phone, but the officers snatched the phone and warned me never to try it. They said the matter did not concern any lawyer.

"Suddenly, my brother started writhing in great pain. After about 30 minutes, he stopped talking and became unconscious. I raised the alarm and called one of the police officers on duty. Yet, nobody answered me. Shortly after this, my brother passed on. One of the senior police officers ordered me and another person in the cell to carry my brother into a vehicle. It was when we got to the Police Clinic that the medical doctor on duty confirmed that Bekinbo had passed on."

According to him, the corpse of Bekinbo was finally deposited at the Military Hospital mortuary, Port Harcourt, after several other mortuaries had refused to accept the corpse.

Ibiye said that the deceased brother did not commit any crime that would warrant his torture and untimely death in the hands of police. Gripped by grief, Bekinbo's wife, Ibiye and his siblings have been urging the Rivers State Commissioner of the Police, Ahmed Zaki, to unravel the circumstances and persons involved in the death of the deceased while in custody at the Mile 1 Police Station, Port Harcourt. They also urged the police high command not to sweep the matter under the carpet.

At the residence of Bekinbo in Oyigbo, his wife, Nkiru, told Sunday Sun that she was yet to believe the story about her husband's demise.

She said: "I was surprised when news about his death got to me. Nobody gave me a vivid explanation of what happened to him. What the relatives told me is that he died in police custody. My husband left home that morning hale and hearty. He didn't complain of any issue. So, I still find it difficult to believe what they are saying. My husband was a peaceful man. That is why he always preached peace.

"My husband did not like problem. His half-brothers are troublesome. They had provoked us a lot. In fact, it was because of their nature that made us to relocate to Oyigbo. Some years ago, he survived an assassination attempt by them. They came about midnight and attacked him with machetes. He sustained deep machete cuts on his stomach. The incident kept him in hospital for several months.

"My pain is that I had severally told him to leave the family property for them and relocate, since his relatives were after his life. Now, they have succeeded in eliminating him.

"I am short of words. His death is quite painful and I am helpless. How can I stop crying when I have to cater for these seven children alone? Is it easy? Where do I start? I need justice. The killers of my husband should not be allowed to go free."

Bekinbo's younger sister, Nene Chima Goodhead, could not hold back tears as she spoke with Sunday Sun, and appealed that perpetrators of the dastardly act should not be allowed to go scot-free.

"We had severally told him to shun their relationship. But, he never listened to us, his siblings. He would always tell us that he wanted our father's property shared together. Now, the relatives have succeeded in killing him. What is the gain?" Nene asked.

In a copy of the court judgement given by a Judge of the Rivers State High Court in Port Harcourt, Justice E. N. Ogbuji, on July 24, 2015, regarding the contentious property, the court made seven declaratory orders, and specifically recognized the first, second and third claimants, Mrs. Comfort Chima Goodhead, Bekinbo Chima Goodhead and Miss Dodoba Chima Goodhead, as the first wife, first son and first daughter, respectively.

Also, in the third order, the court stated: "The defendants cannot carry out or undertake the funeral obsequies of the deceased Chima Goodhead without the leadership or participation of the claimants."

Again, the court in its fourth order gave perpetual injunction restraining the "defendants by themselves, their agents, privies, sympathizers, or howsoever called from carrying out or undertaking the funeral obsequies of the deceased, Chima Goodhead, without the leadership or participation of the claimants."

In the fifth order, the court stated that the property of their late father at No. 5 Udi Street, "belongs jointly to his wives, children and other dependents."

Justice E. N. Ogbuji, particularly granted a perpetual injunction that restrained the "defendants, especially the second (defendant), from further collecting rent from the property known as or called No. Udi Street, Mile 1, Diobu, Port Harcourt."

Reacting to the incident, the Chairman, Rivers State Civil Society Organizations, Comrade Enefaa Georgewill, tasked the Nigeria Police Force to unravel the police personnel accused of torturing the deceased to death.

He said: "The story is too pathetic that in this 21st century, police would arrest, detain and torture a man to death for mere property and family affairs disagreement.

"To make it worse, the same man had a judgement putting the said property in the possession and control of the deceased. Yet, the police overlooked all those evidences; overlooked all the relevant documents concerning the property, arrested, tortured and detained the victim leading to his untimely death.

"As a responsible organization, the Rivers State CSOs are calling on the police high command to come out clean in this matter, by arresting and punishing all officers involved in the matter in order to show its neutrality in this matter.

"We, the CSOs, will use every international instrument in our power to make sure that this matter is not swept under the carpet. We still call on the Police High Command in this country to use the opportunity and reform the Police Force, as they are becoming more or less, an embarrassment to the country."

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