

GANG OF VIPERS

...They killed. They kidnapped. They raped.

by NGOZI UWUJARE

ON April 16, 2018, a gang of kidnapers opened fire on a car travelling on the Owerri/Port Harcourt Road in Umuapau, Ohaji Local Government Area, Imo State. One of the passengers, Oluchi Nnádumele, an undergraduate of University of Port Harcourt died on the spot. The remaining seven survivors—all of them females—were held hostage for five days until a ransom of N5.8m was extracted from their relatives. While in captivity, the hostages were raped severally by their captors. Four months after the crime, the perpetrators—a five-man gang led by 25-year-old Idris Olayinka Ishola and four others who all hailed from Omudioga in Emohua LGA, Rivers State—are now in the net of the Imo State Police Command.

But for the killing of Nnádumele, the crime would have gone unnoticed as hostages regained their freedom and quietly went back to their lives.

Before the burial of the remains of the deceased on May 1 at Awo-Idemili in Orlu Local Government Area, Imo State, her father, Chief Norbert Nnádumele had reported the murder of his daughter to the Police.

Imo State Commissioner of Police Galandachi Dasuki had subsequently ordered the anti-kidnapping squad to take over the case. On August 29, four months and two weeks later, detectives nabbed the five kidnapers responsible for the heinous crimes of April 16.

The suspects identified as Idris Olayinka Ishola, 25, Gift Igwe, 27, Solomon Godwin, 28 and Woja Okechukwu were arrested at No. 8 Alawama Estate, Rumuokoro, Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State.

How they shared the kidnap loot

Idris Olayinka Ishola hails from Osun State. He had his education at Okoronodu Primary School and Community Secondary School, both in Rumuokoro. He claimed they were a sub-group of a 40-man kidnap gang. He claimed responsibility for over 15 kidnappings, the victims all of whom were females, were raped while being



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held hostage before their families ransomed them.

He recalled the operation of April 16: "We laid an ambush along Owerri-Port Harcourt road at Umuapu in Ohaji Local Government Area. We saw the car approaching around 5 pm. We opened fire and the bullets struck one of the passengers. We stoned the car and forced it to a stop. We then held the other seven hostages. We raped them before their relatives paid N5.8 million. I was the one who went to sell the deceased's phone at Garrison Port Harcourt for N15, 000. Later, I was given N150, 000 as my share of the ransom."

Another suspect, Solomon Godwin, who claimed to be an orphan, described his role thus: "I fetched water for our boss. I was the one who fed the seven hostages for five days before their relatives paid their ransom. I was given N50, 000 as my share."

Sylvester Chima, 20, who joined the kidnap gang in 2017 said his duty was to take care of the victims in the bush. "I am a carpenter by profession," he said. He got N150, 000 from the ransom.

Woja Okechukwu, 22, whose brother was the gang's kingpin was given N100, 000. "Since the operation, my elder brother has escaped from the hideout," he asserted.

Gift Igwe got N150, 000. It was his duty to take the hostages to their hideout deep inside the bush.

According to Commissioner of Police Galandachi Dasuki, the suspects will soon be docked in the court.