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Controversy over death of 16-year-old student

•Military operatives tortured, killed my boy – Bereaved mum •I'm not aware of incident – Task force spokesman

10th July 2019 in [Lifeline](#)

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The deceased and his mother.

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Gyang Bere, Jos

These days, life has become totally sour and meaningless for Rahmatu Mahmud Falke. Her 26-year-old son, Salihu Umar Falke was allegedly tortured to death by personnel of the Special Task Force (STF), also known as Operation Safe Haven (OPSH) in charge of internal security in Plateau and neighbouring states.

It was gathered that the soldiers picked Salihu up from his residence at Garba Daho ward, Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State following an invitation to the soldiers by the deceased's uncle and leader of the vigilance group in the community, Alhaji Danjuma Falke.

Falke, the reporter learnt, had invited the soldiers from Sector 2 Command following skirmishes between some youths in the area on Thursday, May 9.

Youths within and outside the community had converged on the area with machetes, sticks, knives and other dangerous weapons, beating innocent people and causing mayhem.

The youths also attacked one Khalifa, inflicting injuries on him until he was hospitalised. The havoc was getting out of control until soldiers from Sector 2 Command of the Operation Safe Haven came and curtailed the crisis.



Members of Operation Safe Haven on patrol.

The soldiers arrested nine persons in connection with the crisis and took them to their base at Sector 2 Command.

On Friday, May 10, the soldiers returned to the family of Danjuma Falke and asked for 16-year-old Salihu Umar Falke, for questioning. The father of the boy, who is also leader of the vigilantes in the area, released the boy without hesitation. But he pleaded with the soldiers not to beat the boy, saying that he had head injuries. Salihu had returned from Birmingham University Teaching Hospital just about two weeks before, after he fell from a truck and broke his head.



Salihu

The soldiers reportedly took Salihu to the Sector 2 Command that fateful Friday, but he was not returned home. He was allegedly tortured and beaten to death and his lifeless body dumped in the military cell.

His cell partner said he noticed that Salihu was lying down awkwardly and wanted him to sleep properly. That was when he discovered that Salihu had become motionless.

The cell partner started screaming, and the noise attracted the soldiers. It was gathered that when the soldiers discovered that he was dead, they quickly released the cell partner, cleaned up the corpse and took the body to the Plateau Specialist Hospital morgue in Jos.

The Sector Commander, it was gathered, then sent some military officers to the home of Salihu's uncle, Danjuma Falke that Friday at about 10:30pm to inform the family that Salihu was dead. There was a protest that night led by Rahmatu Falke, mother of the boy when the sad news broke out.

The delegation, which was led by Lt. M Yusuf, pleaded with the family and promised that a panel was going to be raised to investigate what led to Salihu's death. He pledged that whoever was found culpable would be punished.

The family was bitter and sad over the incident. The family's pain, particularly the mother, was that the military men were informed that the boy had a head injury, yet they still tortured the deceased on the head.

The family recovered the corpse on Saturday May 11, at the Plateau Specialist Hospital Jos for burial according to Islamic rites.

According to the family, the Commander of the Operation Safe Haven, Major General Augustine Agundu sent another delegation led by the Chief Imam of the Command for a condolence visit. The family was also assured that justice would be done.

But the family said they were not satisfied with the soldiers' action, since the real story of their son's death had not been revealed to them.

Shortly after, the soldiers also visited the family on yet another condolence visit, during which they brought food items to the family.

That action sparked another protest in the community. Women, led by mother of the deceased, Rahmatu rejected the food items and insisted on knowing what led to the death of her son for justice to prevail.

The family was further angered with the reaction of the spokesperson of the task force who reportedly said that Salihu did not die in the soldier's custody but that he was running away when a fence on him.

Since then, Rahmatu, mother of the deceased, has been like a walking corpse. Life has become meaningless to her. Family members said she has not been sleeping well since the incident.

She has vowed to seek justice, even if the STF headquarters wouldn't fish out those behind the torture and killing of her son.

Uncle to the deceased, Alhaji Danjuma Falke, who spoke to our correspondent, said the matter couldn't be swept under the carpet as it involved the life of an innocent young man.

Falke said the family was not satisfied with the explanation of the soldiers. He said it was regrettable that since the incident occurred, nobody has told the family of any progress in the investigation into how Salihu met his untimely death.

Falke, who is the leader of vigilance group in the community, said he personally handed Salihu over to the soldiers on the condition that they would not touch him on his head, since the boy had head injuries.

“When we washed the corpse at the Plateau Specialist Hospital Jos, we discovered that his head was swollen, with deep cuts. His legs and neck were injured and two of his ribs were broken.”

He also explained what led to the deceased’s death. His words: “We are from Garba Daho ward in Jos North. In the community, we formed a vigilance group, so that if there is any misunderstanding within the community, we try to settle it among ourselves.

“For the fact that the place is highly dominated by Muslims, the vigilantes are responsible for the security of whoever comes into the community. There are Christians and churches that we protect within the community.

“When something happens, we always try to call on the Neighbourhood Watch to ensure that the matter did not escalate. So it was on Wednesday, May 8 in the night. There was a misunderstanding in the community and the following day it was as if the whole thing was calming down.

“But in the evening, youths from different wards came together and they stormed my house with the intention that they would fight our children. They came with weapons such as machetes, sticks, knives. When they saw one of our boys outside, they started beating him, cutting him with their machetes.

“Immediately we informed the vigilance group and the Neighbourhood Watch, and they came and sent the youths away. We contacted C Division and Special Task Force Sector 2 for them to maintain peace in the area and they all came.

“The military arrested the youths that had weapons with them and we agreed that anybody that was involved should be arrested. One of our children that was involved was arrested and one of them was injured and was in the hospital.

“On Friday, the military came back and said we should give them the whole youths in our house and they said they had arrested nine people. We asked Salihu Umar Falke to come out and follow them.

“On that same Friday, about 11pm, one Lieutenant M. Yusuf came to our house and reported that Salihu is dead but we were not convinced. We told them that they were the ones who killed the boy. We told them that the boy was not well.

“The military men were begging us to take the matter easy and that they were going to investigate and find out what actually led to his death. They said that whoever is involved would be punished.

“When he died, the military took the corpse to the Plateau Specialist Hospital, Jos. We went there on Saturday morning and met them and we took the corpse for burial. But somebody told us that he saw the military people beating Salihu at the Sector 2 Command at Farin-Gada, opposite the University of Jos. Women started protesting when the news came to us.

“Also, a boy that was in the cell with Salihu told us that after they beat and tortured him, they took him and dumped him in the cell. They didn’t know that Salihu was dead.

“The mother is asking for justice over the death of her son. She is bitter because her son was tortured to death. We handed over our son to them alive and there is no reason they should bring his corpse to us.

“We are very bitter now because of what the Sector is saying now, that Salihu wanted to run away from their custody and wanted to climb a fence and the fence fell on him and he died.

“I was so surprised that the STF would say this. They know that this boy died in their custody and if it was a fence that fell on him, why did they carry the corpse to the hospital? They should have left him there for us to come and carry the corpse.

“This matter involved a life, and the issue will not just die like that because the military are not willing to tell us the truth over what happened to our son. How will they kill our son and turn round to tell us that it was a fence that fell on him when he was running. We will seek justice on the matter,” he said.

Reacting to the grave allegations, spokesman of the task force, Major Shittu Ibrahim Abiodun, who spoke with the reporter on phone, denied knowledge of the incident.

“I am not aware of what you are saying because I am at the Headquarters of the STF and I have not been briefed about such incident. I don’t believe such an incident will happen in the STF,” he stated.