

Land dispute:

TENSION IN IMO COMMUNITY AS POLICE BEAT MAN TO DEATH

■ Our officers didn't kill him, he complained of weakness —Imo police spokesman

From George Onyejiwa, Owerri

THE Nkworji family and indeed the entire people of Apuru Nneorie autonomous community in Ngor Okpala council of Imo State were on the November 1, thrown into mourning following the alleged murder of their son, Mr Bede Nkworji by operatives of the anti-vice team from the State Police Headquarters, Owerri led by one Caroline alias Mama G.

Sunday Sun reliably gathered that Mr Oforina Okere who had since fled the community with his family members to unknown destination following the burning of the home by irate youths of the community had written a petition against the Nkworjis over protracted boundary dispute.

Sunday Sun learnt that six plain-cloth police officers led by Caroline, Mama G, who were accompanied by Oforina Okere had stormed the home of the Nkworjis at about 5:00a.m on that fateful Friday, November 1 and immediately they got to the house, the operatives who allegedly broke down the door to the room of the late Bede Nkworji, dragged him out and started beating him with the butts of their rifles, and then stripped him naked, threw the deceased who was already gasping for breath following the severe beating into the back of their Hilux vehicle and drove to Nguru community also in Ngor Okpala to arrest Mangnus Nkworji, the younger brother of the deceased.

Earlier, the rampaging police officers, it was learnt, had arrested Ejike Ekeololo who had sold the land to the Nkworjis and had also testified before the community's arbitration committee that the boundary which is being claimed by Oforina Okere actually belongs to the Nkworjis.

Magnus Nkworji who disclosed this to Sunday Sun said that the family has petitioned Zone 9, Umuahia to investigate the alleged killing of his elder brother and a father of two by officers of the anti-vice of the Imo State police.

Narrating their ordeals in the hands of the police, Magnus said: "On the morning of Friday, which was November 1, 2019, I was in my house in Umuahia. Nguru

at about 6:30a.m when police operatives wearing police T-shirt numbering about six and led by a woman called "Mama G" who I later learnt is Caroline came to my house and immediately I came out they pounced on me and started beating me as if I was a criminal and dragged into their vehicle and it was there that I discovered that my elder brother, Bede was lying down naked in their vehicle.

"When I asked him what happened, he said that he was feeling weak as a result of the severe beating he had received from the police operatives and he was also stripped naked by the police. It was on the way that he died before we got to the state CID when the police operatives discovered that he had died they asked me to take the body back to the village, but I refused and asked them to take the dead body back to the village and explain to the people what they did to him. It was as result of my refusal that they took the corpse to Federal Medical Centre, Owerri and deposited the corpse at the mortuary".

Magnus disclosed that after the death of his elder brother the Imo State police authorities promised to come to the village to investigate what had happened, but never showed up, which he said prompted the family to petition the Southeast zonal police headquarters at Umuahia to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of his elder brother.

"We had to petition Zone 9, Umuahia following the lukewarm attitude of the Imo State Police Command to investigate the cold blooded murder of my brother by their officers. Since that incident, the state police command had refused to investigate the matter.

"The only time they invited us to the state CID was when they learnt that we had petitioned Zone 9 Umuahia and the officer handling our petition at Zone 9 Umuahia instructed them not to go as the matter has been taken over by the Zonal police headquarters Umuahia."

He further alleged that Oforina Okere who fled the village with members of his family had threatened to deal with his family over the land matter.

"It was six months ago that Oforina Okere started encroaching on our land and even when the man



•The late Bede Nkworji

who sold the land to us had testified that the portion of land which he is claiming belongs to us he threatened to use the police to deal with us. And that was exactly what he did."

Also, members of the community who expressed dismay over the killing of their kinsman wondered how the police could come into a community to effect an arrest of an indigene of the community without informing the traditional ruler or the village head.

Mr Caleb Atufu, public relations officer of Apuru Nneorie Youths told Sunday Sun that the entire community was surprised when the news that Bede had been beaten to death by police spread to the community.

"The entire community was thrown into disbelief when the news filtered into the community

that Bede Nkworji has been beaten to death by police operatives who were invited by Oforina Okere over a boundary dispute with them. The most surprising thing is that the police never informed the Eze of the community or the village head of Apuru village of their mission.

"That Friday was our market day and most people had gone to the market; it was after in the evening that we learnt of his death. Earlier we heard that Oforina Okere who has been disputing a boundary with the Nkworji family had invited the police to arrest Bede and from what I learnt from witnesses Bede never resisted arrest as he was dragged out of his house and beaten to stupor by the police officers.

"Now, the police who came about 5:00a.m into the community to effect arrest of an indigene



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of the community never deemed it fit to inform the traditional ruler or even the Nze of the Apuru Nneorie community of their mission which means that their mission was illegal," he said.

However, when contacted, the spokesman of the Imo State Police Command, Orlando Ikeokwu (SP) said that Bede was not beaten to death by the police, but had died on his way to the state CID after complaining of weakness.

"The police operatives had gone to arrest Bede Nkworji following a petition against him by one Oforina Okere over boundary dispute. So, the police officers had gone to arrest him, but unfortunately he died on his way to the state CID after he was said to have complained of weakness and his body was then deposited at the morgue of the Federal Medical Centre Owerri."