

■ I am not happy with what I did and I want to die –Herdsman ■ My mother didn't reap fruit of her labour –Daughter of deceased ■ Community of victim to meet on Tuesday

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SHARES VIEWS

Chijioke Agwu, Abakaliki

Fulani herdsman, Laulo Isa, who raped Mrs Mary Okereke, a 54-year old widow, to death in Ebonyi State, has blamed alcohol for his wicked action.

Mrs Okekere, a well-known fish seller from Umuikegwu Umueze kindred in Ufuezereaku, Ugwulangwu autonomous community in Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State and mother of five, was allegedly waylaid and raped to death by Isa, a herdsman from Nasarawa State, who camped in a small bush in-between Ufuezereaku and Ugwulangwu market, while she was coming from Nkwo Ugwulangwu market on the night of December 28, 2019.

The action made 2019 to end on a very sad note for the Umuikegwu Umueze kindred.

Isa, 20, has since confessed to the crime, but said that he committed the atrocity under the influence of alcohol. He spoke to newsmen after he was paraded by the police in Abakaliki, the Ebonyi State capital.

According to him, he was moved to commit the act because of the insults the woman heaped on him after rejecting his sexual advances.

He said: “I am Lauilo Isa, I am from Nassarawa. I came for work here in Ebonyi. I was seriously drunk and saw a woman in the night walking along the road. I approached her for sex and she started abusing me.

“We started abusing ourselves and I immediately pounced on her and she started struggling with me to free herself. I was seriously drunk that time. As I was on her, a man who was passing flashed his torchlight on me and I ran away.

“I don’t know whether I was having sex with her, but she was on ground with me. I did not hit her with any object, but it’s like I had sex with her for one round. We were both on the ground when a man flashed light on me and I ran away.

“I am not happy with what I did and I want to die. I want to die! I want to die! I have never done this type of thing since God created me on this earth. I am begging for forgiveness”.

When Sunday Sun visited the Ufuezeaku home of the deceased, a compound of four mud houses, the premises was practically desolate. A member of the family, Mr Okorie Elom, who eventually emerged and introduced himself as a chairman of Umuikegwu Umeze kindred, lamented that he had not been able to eat anything since the day of the incident.

He said many members of the family had left the compound in fear and shock since that day; adding that they were yet to come to terms with her death.

Admitting that herdsmen had been a source of concern to their people as they were fond of destroying their farmlands noted that the deceased was wasted without provocation.

Elom described the deceased as hardworking and peaceful wife of his late uncle, stressing that she was hale and hearty when she left the compound on that fateful day.

He called on the people of old Ohaozara and the government to take urgent actions to stop Fulani herdsmen in the area.

He said: “The woman that was killed by the herdsman was my father’s brother’s wife. We as a family are in serious shock now, since the day she was killed till today, we have been in mourning. I have not been able to move out of the compound. Some people out of fear have deserted the compound as you can see.

“We don’t know how to accept the reality of her death. She was coming back from the Nkwo market where she went to make order for fish that she used to sell to be sent to her ahead of the New Year celebration when she was murdered by the Fulani people.

“They have been destroying our farms and obstructing smooth movement here in our community. We have been complaining, but our leaders even those in government have not been able to do anything about it. Now, they have started killing us. The next thing is to ask us to leave our ancestral homes for them.

“This is not something we can handle alone as a family, the woman gave birth to five children, all female and her husband had died long ago. We have nobody to speak for us on this grave injustice. We are appealing to the people of Ugwulangwu

and the entire old Ohaozara to come to our aid because this matter is bigger than us. We cannot continue to keep quiet again, and you don't need to say that you are not from Ugwulangwu or Ohaozara to help us drive this people out of our lands because when they finish killing us in Ugwulangwu, no one knows the next community they will start another killing. We have to come together now and save ourselves.”

Our correspondent also traced the first daughter of the deceased, Adannaya Okereke, to another area of the community where she bemoaned that her mother was killed at a time she was supposed to reap the fruits of her labour.

Appealing to the people of Ugwulangwu and the government to ensure justice was done in the matter; she said: “My mother was a very calm and hardworking woman. I can't believe she was just killed like that by strangers in her own land. She is dead now, we don't have a mother again (crying). Our father died when we were small and she was the one that was struggling alone to raise us up. She used to work for people in their farms just to make sure that we were not hungry. She was doing that until she changed to selling fish just to raise us up. My pain is that she has gone without eating the fruits of her labour. God will avenge this death for us because we don't have anyone to fight for us.

“I am appealing to the government to do something about these Fulani people. How many more people will be killed before they will be asked to leave us alone in our community?”

Traditional ruler of Ugwulangwu autonomous community, Eze Romanus Iyioku, who is also first deputy chairman, Ebonyi State Traditional Rulers' Council, condemned the killing and assured that the matter would be given the proper attention it deserves.

He told Sunday Sun in his palace that he had already convened a meeting of Ugwulangwu sons and daughters for January 7, to discuss the matter.

State Commissioner of Police, Awotunde Awosola told newsmen that the suspect would be prosecuted for the crime.

Giving insight into police findings on the incident, Awosola said: “There was a struggle between the two of them, but he overpowered the woman and had carnal knowledge of the woman. Unfortunately, the woman lost her life during the incident”.

He added that the police with the assistance of the youths in the community had combed the forests and farmlands in the area in search of the suspect before he was eventually nabbed.

According to him, the suspect had left some of his belongings at the scene of the incident, which was used to identify him as the culprit.

“Through the concerted efforts of my DPO in Ohaozara with the assistance of the youths in the community, they began a search for the suspect who unfortunately left his cap and slippers in a bid to escape from that scene.

“So, with the assistance from two other Fulani guys, we were able to identify him through that cap and slippers and he was subsequently arrested and he is now with us and he is going to face the full weight of the law”.

The police commissioner who indicated that autopsy was to be carried out on the body of the deceased woman urged Ebonyi people not to fear “because the police are ready to provide security for all law-abiding citizens.”

Okposi and Uburu communities in Ohaozara and their neighbours of Onicha local government area had suffered the pangs of unrestrained attacks by Fulani herders.

In July 2019, for instance, Agu Ufuoke Owom Oshiri in Onicha Local Government Area, was overran by Fulani herdsmen who came in their numbers and occupied the vast land.

The herders attacked some youths of the community whose farm crops were destroyed by cattle. The youth had confronted them and demanded that they leave their community and in the process, the herders caught two of them and lacerated their bodies with sharp knives after fastening them to stake.

Sunday Sun learnt that it took the timely intervention of the council Chairman, Felix Igboke who alerted the security operatives in the area and with the help of the Divisional Police Officer, before the ‘captives’ were released. They were immediately taken to a hospital for treatment.

Even though no life was lost in the incident, other communities in the local government had also resolved that Fulani herders in their areas must leave to avert the Oshiri incident repeating itself.

This automatically led to palpable tension in the local government with rumours of impending massive attack by the Fulani on the people of the various communities becoming rife.

However, with the intervention of the local government chairman and support of security agencies, especially the SARS operatives, both the communities and the leadership of the Fulani herders in the area arrived at an agreement which led to the parties embracing one another with a resolve to live peacefully.

A series of meetings culminated in the peace accord by the parties in the local government after a five-hour dialogue held at the council’s banquet hall in Isu on August 26, 2019.

However, with the recent incident in Ugwulangwu, the people of the entire old Ohaozara now live in fear again.