

# The Lifeline

## Widow, in-laws fight dirty

- They forcefully took away my children, sold our property, she alleges
- She teamed up with siblings, attacked and killed husband, in-laws insist

By Tony John, Port Harcourt

A widow, Princess Vivian Madu, has appealed to President Muhammadu Buhari, the Inspector-General of Police, the National Assembly Committees on Women Affairs and Public Petitions and various women's groups to help recover her children from her in-laws.

Princess, who hails from Ngor Okpala Local Government Area in Owerri North, Imo State, got married to Mr. Aloysius Odinakachukwu Madu, a native of Ehim Mbano LGA, Imo State. The union was blessed with four children: Fedora, 13 years old, Jessica, 11, Frederick, eight, and Jeffrey, six.

For two years running, the widow said she has not seen her four children, who allegedly were unilaterally "shared" among her in-laws, following her husband's death in 2019. She said more shocking was the fact that she did not know when and where her husband was buried.

Narrating her ordeal, Princess said her agony started sometime in 2019, when her husband engaged in fistfights with one of her brothers who had come to their house to plead for restraint, following alleged frequent wife battering from the late Madu.

According to the widow, her sister-in-law, who was staying with them at the time, was a source of constant friction, as her husband always supported his sister, and any attempt by her (Princess) to explain things was met with beatings.

She alleged it was on one of those occasions that she was beaten to a pulp by her husband, which her family members got to know about, prompting her brothers and pregnant sister to come around to see her husband.

Princess, who was married to her 40-year-old husband at the age of 16, further disclosed that she had often reported her husband's beatings to his family members, who did little to call him to order and would rather wave her off.

She disclosed that the matter was reported to the Oyoibo Police Station in Rivers State, but nothing was done to stop the beatings. She added that the next day, after the husband's brawl with her brother, he went to file a complaint at the same Oyoibo Police Station and she was detained, based on his petition.

"That was the last time she saw or heard from her husband, as she later learnt that he became sick and was eventually taken to the hospital by his family, where she gathered he died."

The Madu family later brought the police to arrest her, two brothers and pregnant sister for allegedly murdering her husband.

According to her, they were detained at the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID), Port Harcourt, for four months before being charged to court, from where they were remained in prison custody.

The widow said she was eventually granted bail on special grounds to take care of her four children, pending the determination of



•The late Madu

•Princess



•Princess with three of her children

the trial. Princess lamented: "I have done nothing to deserve this treatment from my in-laws. I am really shocked at their attitude and it means there is more than what they are telling me."

The widow alleged further that, while she was in detention and prison custody, her in-laws sold off most of her husband's property, in addition to 'sharing' her children among themselves and, since then, she has not set eyes on them.

She said: "As a mother, I cry every day, not knowing what is happening to my children, especially as one of them needs special care. This is really torturing me as I am mostly lost in thought, sometimes not being able to sleep."

While the alleged murder case is still on, determined to see her children, Princess said she headed to the Juvenile Court, sitting in Port Harcourt, where she got an order for the children to be released to her but the judgment was not obeyed by her in-laws,

prompting her to return to the court and for which a bench warrant was issued for the commissioner of police in Rivers State to bring them before the court.

However, neither the judgment of the court nor bench warrant has been executed by the commissioner of police, Rivers State, despite attempts she made to make the police see the reason they should do their job.

She stated that she has repeatedly met with police officials in Rivers and Abuja, with little success coming out of such meetings, pointing out that she finds it difficult to understand how the police would fail to carry out a legitimate court order, ordering the commissioner of police to produce her in-laws in court.

"I am calling on President Muhammadu Buhari and the Inspector-General of Police to help me rescue my children from my in-laws, four children, who are all legitimately mine. The psychological and emotional torture are simply unbearable," she said.

Meanwhile, the Extra Step Initiative (TESI) and Nollywood actress and women's rights activist, Hilda Dokubo, took her before the Human Rights Radio and the Ordinary President of Brekete Family, and for which a formal complaint was filed with the Human Rights desk at Force Headquarters, Abuja.

She alleged that the police, instead of rescuing the children, admitted a fresh petition by her in-laws about threat to life for which she was invited to Abuja.

It was gathered that the devastated woman is currently unemployed, homeless and lives in a church premise in Port Harcourt.

It was further learnt that the meeting in Abuja held and the police asked the in-laws to pledge to allow her access to her children on a yet-to-be-determined date but, that she must go back to the court to seek an order directing the police to rescue the children.

Dokubo, who has been very much interested in the matter, expressed shock over what has transpired so far and called on those in authority to ensure the widow is allowed to take custody of her children pending the determination of the alleged murder case in court.

She said: "How do you take away somebody's children, especially with one of them with special needs? It is bad enough that she is grieving about the loss of her husband. But to also be burdened with four children removed from her, it is tantamount to kidnapping her four children. As a mother, she is going through emotional and psychological pains; it is mental torture that she is going through right now and they are mentally abusing her constantly."

"They have taken away every means of sustenance from her; they have taken away her business. The business she was running with her husband, they have taken that away from her. So, they have taken away her economic power. If she was not a strong woman, to have started off something else for herself that she is doing, maybe, today, she would be among the women on the street begging for food."

"How do they even imagine that any mother can sleep well, knowing that her children are somewhere else and she is not sure what they are doing? No mother can eat, trust me on that. So, they are mentally torturing her daily; they are emotionally torturing her by the minute. How do you cope with your mind, thinking about your husband, how he died, what happened to him, who saw him? There is just so much running in that young girl's head right now."

"And they are further punishing her by dragging her from one police station to the other. They should be arrested, those people need to be arrested and jailed because they know what happened to the man. They should tell the world what they did to their brother; they should stop dragging her up and down and creating unnecessary distractions."

"The police people that are helping them to perpetrate this type of rubbish should



•Battered face of Princess

be arrested as well because this is total madness. They should give her her children; she has already got a court order that the children be released to her. Are these policemen above the law? Who are they?"

Also, Barrister Ben Uzozie, who has been handling the matters in the court on behalf of the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria, expressed shock over the attitude of police officers, who, he said, have simply refused to carry out their constitutional responsibilities despite being in possession of a valid court order.

According to him, the family swore that she would not see her children, prompting them to head to the Juvenile Court, Port Harcourt, to file a suit, asking the court to 'please grant custody of these juveniles to their mother. Their mother is alive, their mother is out of prison, their mother has been granted bail so that she can take care of these children. We served them the process, the proof of service is in the court file.'

"The court started hearing the matter. At the end, we got a judgment from the Juvenile Court of Port Harcourt asking the brothers-in-law to immediately give custody of the children to their mother. The brothers-in-law refused. They said they would not, that the family, according to their Mbano custom, will not allow her to see her children."

"Now they are alleging she killed her husband. I was not there, but the matter is going on in the court. At the end of the trial, the court will either convict her or acquit her. So, why don't you allow the court to carry on and allow her to see her children? If the court convicts her, she will go for it. They said no."

"Now, what we did after the judgment was given, we filed Form 48 and 49, which is contempt, telling them, ordering them to come to court and tell the court the reason they should not obey the court order."

"When that was filed, they refused to come to court and the court issued a bench warrant directing the commissioner of police to arrest them and bring them to court. That bench warrant was served on the Deputy Commissioner of Police, State CID, who refused to arrest them. They came to police, the police saw them one-on-one. But they refused to arrest them, they refused to bring them to court," he said.

Uzozie further explained that the Rivers State Commissioner of Police was petitioned, where the widow lamented how she learned that one of the children had been taken away for child labour in Abuja, but nothing came out of it.

He called on the IGP to urgently wade into the matter and help save the image of police from being further eroded by those who, he said, are sabotaging genuine efforts of the institution.

A director of TESI, Mr. Eugene Abels, expressed displeasure with the attitude of police officials who are disobeying a constitutionally recognized arm of government saddled with interpreting the laws of Nigeria.

He said: "We have one police force, and it is very unprofessional for the same police to admit alternate time-wasting petitions on a subsisting petition and pray the IGP to use the officers concerned as an example in his reorganization of the service."

"It is appalling in this day and age that the widow is being denied succour by the agency meant to protect her and her children, as she is being made to go through emotional and mental torture by her in-laws. Even more shocking is the attitude of the police officers who should know better in carrying out valid court orders and help Nigerians have confidence in the rule of law rather than resorting to self-help."

"The police must act by rescuing the kids, escort them and their mother into their home currently under siege and extract the requisite undertaking from the in-laws."

Meanwhile, the reporter contacted one of the in-laws, identified as Emeka Madu, on 07031590000, for reaction. When he answered the phone, Emeka, however, handed the phone over to someone he said was his elder brother (though he did not mention his name).

The said elder brother referred the reporter to the Rivers State High Court handling the matter. He said the widow and two of her brothers were charged to court for murder.

He said: "My brother (referring to the reporter), it is a long story. Please, if you can make inquiry, the lady and her siblings attacked the husband, killed him and police arrested them and found four of them culpable and they were arraigned in court."

"Four of them were arraigned before High Court Six. You can go to the court and get more facts. They faced murder charge. She is on conditional release based in the fact her lawyer said that they were stranded since the husband has died. She was granted conditional bail. She was charged and remanded in prison custody."

"Within this period, the children were stranded. The immediate family of the deceased, being the owner of the children, took over the children and are taking care of them. She has gone to several places while the matter is still in court and she has not gotten anything."

"She has gone to FIDA, she has gone to Legal Aid, Ministry of Social Welfare, she has gone to Abuja, she has gone to Brekete FM. When they heard her story, they asked, Will you be in prison and take care of your children? Is it possible?"

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