

# The Lifeline

## Families at war over death of apprentice

- He was tortured to death – Father
- He committed suicide – Master

From **Geoffrey Anyanwu, Enugu**

**THE** death of a 23-year-old only child, **Martin Chinemelum Ogbu**, allegedly in police custody in Lagos, has thrown the Ogbu family into inconsolable grief.

It has also triggered crisis in the hitherto robust relationship between the families of Ogbu from Ihenyi, Ehamufu, in Isu-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State, and Edoka, from Inyaba Ngo Umudim Nnewi, in Anambra State.

Chinemelum was, before his suspicious demise on March 28, an apprentice to **Mr. Fidelis Edoka**, a Lagos-based businessman. The present situation is so bad that it has become difficult for the two families to sit together to discuss the issues surrounding the death of the young man, the only child of **Mr. Michael Nnaji Ogbu**.

The heartbroken father told *Daily Sun* that it was unreasonable for his late son's master, Fidelis, to "pretend and send people to come and beg me for us to settle. Settle what? What are we going to settle now that my only child is dead?"

He said: "I begged him, after they tortured my son and damaged his left eye and he escaped from where Fidelis locked him up in his house and returned to Nnewi, to come let us settle whatever it is. His own father begged him also but he refused and insisted I must bring him back to his house in Lagos to settle. With all he did to him, I still took him to Lagos only for him to bring policemen, who took my son away and wasted him when he was aware he was my only child, and now he wants me to settle with him."

But Fidelis said he could not have killed the young man, whom he took as a son and brother and gave access to his warehouses even when he was not his manager.

He said he had already petitioned the Inspector-General of Police for a thorough investigation into the circumstances that led to Chinemelum's death in a police cell.

Similarly, Chinemelum's father, Ogbu, has, through his lawyer, **Mr. Oboegede Agbo** of Casmir Uchenna Agbo and Associate, Enugu, petitioned Force Headquarters, Abuja, requesting the transfer of the case file from the Trade Fair Police Post, Lagos, to Abuja and for the arrest of Fidelis, his wife and even the IPO for the death of the young man. He also demanded an independent autopsy for the cause of death and for all culpable persons to be charged to court.

### Chinemelum's father's account

Narrating the journey that led to the loss of his only child, 56-year-old Ogbu, who is a carpenter and had been residing in Nnewi since 1982, said: "What happened was that, while my son and only child, 23-year-old Martin Chinemelum Ogbu, was in secondary school, JS2, **Mr. Joseph Edoka**, from Inyaba Ngo Umudim Nnewi, approached me to release my son to come and live with him as he had no person living with, his children were all grown and had left home, hence, he needed someone to assist him in the house. We considered him, being that we were living close to his house and

our eyes could reach the boy while there. So, Chinemerem stayed with him and completed his secondary school education.

"After his secondary school education, the first son of **Mr. Edoka**, **Fidelis**, who lived in Lagos, came and said he wanted to take (Chinemelum) to Lagos to train him in his motor parts business. I asked my son if he wanted to further his education or go into business, he said he wanted business. So, we discussed with Fidelis and agreed that he would stay with him for six years and he would settle him. Since that four years and some months, because he was supposed to settle him next year August, he had not for once given any bad report about Chinemelum.

"But in March this year he (Fidelis) called me on phone one night, asked if I was sick. I said I am okay now that I was sick sometime ago. He switched off the phone and after some minutes called back and complained that Chinemelum sold some of his goods and kept the money with him but refused to acknowledge it. He gave the phone to my son and I asked my son and he said he was not with his master's money. I then told Fidelis that I would come to Lagos so that we could settle the issue. He asked when, and I said when I get money and he said okay and turned off the phone. The next day, very early in the morning, his father, **Mr. Edoka**, came to my house and, after pleasantries, I asked if everything was okay for him to come so early. He said there was no problem just that he heard I was sick and decided to come and check on me. I asked him if his son called him on phone, he said no and I told him that his son (Fidelis) called last night and told of the issue he was having with my son and that I promised to visit Lagos for us to settle it. But because he had come, I was not going to Lagos anymore. He should call his son and tell him to bring Chinemelum home so that all of us would settle the matter together and he agreed that he would do so.

"The next day, in the evening, I went to **Mr. Edoka's** house and I asked if he had given the son the message as we agreed the previous day. He asked me if I did not see his son in my house in the morning, I said no that I left my house very early that day and he said



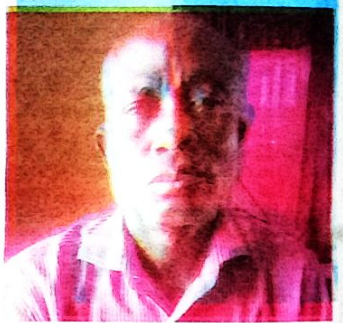
• **Edoka**

his son was in my house in the morning and that he saw my wife. So, I left for my house and, on getting home, my wife told me that Fidelis came with policemen to the house and arrested her and took her to the CPS Nnewi. That the police told her to write a statement because, according to them, her son ran away with his boss's thirty-something million naira and they could not find him in the room where he was kept in Lagos. She said that the police wanted to lock her up after her statement but for her complaint that her child was sick. They, however, told her to tell me to report to the station. But it was late, I couldn't do anything. The next morning I went to his father's house, and both Fidelis and his father were in. I asked Fidelis how come the matter has reached bringing police to arrest my wife, he said he did what he was supposed to do, that my son took his money and ran away, that he ran away from the room where he kept him. He said all he wanted was that I should look for my son and make sure he returned his money to him. I said okay, until I see my son to know whether he is with your money or not. He said I should go and report to the police, but his father and one of their brothers who was there insisted that he (Fidelis) must go with me so that the police would not detain me. He later agreed and took me in his car to the police, where I wrote my statement that I did not know anything about the money, until I see my son to know whether he was with the said money. Police said I should go and look for my child. I said I would, but that his boss whom I handed my son to should also be looking for him, and we left.

"After two weeks, my son called on phone one evening and said he was at Nnewi Roundabout and I went there to pick him and from there straight to **Mr. Edoka's** house. The boy had wounds all over his body and one of his eyes was damaged. I told **Mr. Edoka** that the boy should sleep with him and tell him the full story of his journey with his master but he said no, I should take him to my house first. I said,



• **Chinemelum**



• **Ogbu**

Okay, let him tell you what he knows about the matter and return to the house later. I left him there and he later returned home. Around 8pm, **Mr. Edoka** sent his in-law to come and tell me to come with my son the next morning by 8am. That night, I asked my son what he knew about the over N30 million his Oga claimed he ran away with and he said he knew nothing about it.

"He said that the torture was too much for him and he told them he gave me money to go to hospital so that they would leave him. He said all he knew about was N345,000, which he even informed the manager about. He was duped of the money by somebody, whom he gave it to buy goods and return to him within one week, not knowing he was a fraudster. My son told me that they tied him and beat him as they liked, and locked him up in a room. But when blood started to come out of his chest, he cried and shouted so loudly that his master sent someone to loosen him a bit. With the rope being a bit loose, he hung it around the door handle and began to pull it until it cut. He said he had to break the ceiling around 2am and escape through the roof as his life was in danger.

"That morning, after waiting for some hours at **Mr. Edoka's** house as he said he was waiting for a brother so that the matter would be resolved, **Mr. Edoka** said his son called and said that I should bring my son to Lagos for us to settle. I said why don't we settle this matter here in Nnewi than going to Lagos and he said I should not bother that, as far as he was concerned, the matter would be settled amicably. And I agreed that we would go to Lagos. So, on Friday, March 19, 2021, we left for Lagos: my son, myself and **Edoka's** brother, **Chijioke**. We got to Fidelis' house exactly 3pm. On our arrival, Fidelis began to question my son on many transactions and my son told him that the only one he knew about was the



• **Chams Chinemelum allegedly used**