

Tears as Alabi dies 7 days after release from kidnappers' den

- We facilitated release – Govt, police
- It's a lie, we paid N4.5m ransom – Family

From **Layi Olanrewaju**, Ilorin

AYO Alabi, an engineer in his early 60s, was kidnapped on Saturday, August 7, 2021. He was not alone. He was abducted alongside his elder brother and five others at a point between Eleyin and Omu-Aran, in Isin and Irepodun local government areas of Kwara State.

Seven days later, he died in hospital in Ilorin, the state capital. That was after the abductors collected N4.5 million ransom from his family. Now, the family is accusing the police and the state government of leaving them all alone to deal with the criminals.

On the day of kidnapping, six gunmen emerged and ambushed the Toyota Sienna mini van in which they were travelling from Ekiti State to Ilorin. The hoodlums marched seven occupants of the vehicle into the bush.

In the course of the gruelling trek in the bush, Alabi's family said the elder brother collapsed out of exhaustion and was left behind by the party. He later recovered and took the news of the incident to town.

A day after the kidnap, the gunmen called the family and asked for N30 million, according to Olabode Olabiye, a schoolmate of Alabi at Titcombe College, Egbe, Kogi State. He said he shared the account on the WhatsApp platform of Igbomina Professional Association, a socio-political group in the South senatorial district of the state.

He said he first received the information on the WhatsApp platform of the old students' association of their alma mater: "The family said they informed the police and the political authorities in the state about the kidnap of Alabi and subsequent demand for ransom but received no support.

"After back-and-forth negotiations, a figure of N4.5 million was agreed upon. The money was delivered and the victims were released."

The money was raised with support from some friends of Alabi's, while other victims arranged and paid their own ransoms too.

Mr. Kayode Ojulari, a friend and neighbour of the family, said: "I just left the Ilorin home of Mr. Ayo Alabi, who died after being released by the kidnappers upon ransom collection. I visited his family in company with my elder brothers and sister.

"After reading Baba Oyin's post on this incident, I joined many to comment on it and commiserate with the family. While this was going on, I didn't know the victim was a very well-known person to me. I came to Ilorin only to hear the sad news that the victim was our own Boda Ayo, as we, the younger ones, used to call him.

"The Alabi family and ours (Ojulari family) lived together as next-door neighbours for decades in Ilorin, from the 1960s to the 1980s. On our visit to his house, we met the elder brother (Boda Bode) kidnapped along with him but released earlier in their jungle journey because he wasn't moving fast enough due to a pain in one of his legs. They collected his phone, purse and every dime on him before leaving him.

"On Tuesday, August 10, the ransom was

delivered for Mr. Alabi's release. However, what they found was a man who had been battered from beatings by the kidnappers.

"When my friend was picked up by the rescue party, he was in such a bad shape that he could not walk or stand.

"He had been beaten, battered, brutalised and traumatised. He was supported on a bike through the thick forest back to town and straight to the hospital.

"Unfortunately, he breathed his last at about 4am on Friday, August 13, 2021. He left behind a wife and daughter and we, brothers and friends, all sad, shaken and traumatised. He did not survive the harrowing experience in the kidnappers' den.

"Worse still, the police and Kwara State government that knew nothing about the ransom and rescue went to town on Friday, August 13, to claim victory for the release on radio and television.

"The scourge of kidnapping is real and a present danger. It is when you are affected that you will realise that it is like a film coming to a cinema near you. We are living in dangerous and perilous times and the government is non-existent and totally unresponsive and irresponsible."

Olabiye said family and friends had demanded that the victim's phone be tracked but found out that the police lacked the capacity "because they had not paid subscription for the service since January."

Earlier, seven persons were kidnapped in two separate incidents that Saturday in the state, and the police claimed their officers, local hunters and vigilance groups chased the hoodlums and rescued four of the seven victims.

The police spokesperson, Ajayi Okasanmi, said police promptly responded to information on the two kidnap incidents of August 4, which involved Alabi and his brother.

He said: "The commissioner of police ordered the area commander to go after the hoodlums after receiving information from police channels.

"Promptly, the police dispatched tactical units comprising the anti-kidnapping and anti-cultist units, joined by local hunters and vigilance members, while police patrols on the routes were alerted. The abductors abandoned four of the seven abducted persons but escaped with the other three.

"Deploying similar tactics by operatives, those abducted in Ekan Meje/Ekiti axis using the same modus were equally rescued, remaining a pastor and his wife, who the command is frantically doing everything possible to rescue unhurt.

"Some suspects were arrested and are helping the police in their investigation. The hoodlums operating in the area usually sneak in from a neighbouring state. The CP has requested assistance from police headquarters in Abuja over the development, following which officers were deployed from the Force Criminal Investigations Department (FCID).

"Police do not deal with kidnap victims as individuals. The response of the police is usually to rescue all involved together as soon



• **Alabi**

as possible."

In an interview later with *Daily Sun*, Okasanmi insisted: "It was the efforts of the police that led to the rescue of Alabi and other victims. It was because the police kept the chase on the hoodlums that also led to the rescue of the pastor and his wife who were kidnapped in the other incident of August 4.

"The couple were rescued in Ileje-Meje, Ekiti State, where they arrived after the bandits marched them through the bush for seven hours in their desperate search for a safe hideout. When they were rescued, the man of God and his wife prayed for the police over the efforts they made to rescue them.

"The police will never support payment of ransom to kidnappers and we always make it clear to the families of victims. We instead put pressure on kidnappers to ensure the victims are released.

"Some suspects were arrested over the two incidents. We were not informed of the death of Alabi. We were happy with their rescue and nobody has told us anything since."

The PPRO also dismissed the claim that the police could not track Alabi's phone because they had not paid the service providers since January: "That is not true. No officer will say that to the family of a kidnapped person. It is just an attempt to drag the name of the police in the mud.

"It is not true that we do not have a subscription. Is tracking even paid for like you pay for voice or data services? Tracking is not the only way the police catches up with kidnappers, we have many other measures.

"Nobody who is affected will be happy when their family or friend is kidnapped. We are all sad about such things happening around the country; the police and the government are not happy."

The chief press secretary to the Kwara State governor, Rafiu Ajakaiye, acknowledged that government was alerted on the kidnappings. He said: "The authorities instantly liaised with relevant security agencies, including unofficial local security networks, to rescue the victims and arrest the criminals behind it."

(Continued on www.sunnewsonline.com)