

The Lifeline

"There are no goodbyes
you will always be in my heart"



MISSING IN

- Whereabouts of 4 Ebonyi men travelling to Benue unknown
- Father of 2 victims dies of shock

From Wilson Okereke, Afikpo

ATMOSPHERE of gloom and despondence reigns in the agrarian village of Isiama in Onicha Igboeze community of Onicha Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, following the disappearance of four young men from the area.

In fact, the Amaoja kindred, where the missing persons hailed from, particularly the Chukwu Mba family, is in a quandary.

Daily Sun gathered that Ogonnaya Chukwu, 33, and his brother, Sunday, 31, in company with their in-law, Chinedu Nwite, and a friend, Ogonnaya Ekuma, were on their way to attend a traditional marriage in their maternal home in Benue State, before they vanished.

Mother of the two missing siblings, Mrs. Lydia Chukwu, from Okpa-Ogegen community in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State, told Daily Sun that they left Onicha on December 26, 2021, to attend the marriage of her niece, Esther Oku, slated for December 27, in Benue State but, unfortunately, the four men could neither get to their destination nor be found.

It was learnt that Ogonnaya is a father

of three whose wife is pregnant, while his brother, Sunday, has a child and a pregnant wife. Regarding their in-law, Nwite, his wife is said to be carrying her first pregnancy, while Ekuma is still a bachelor.

The grief-stricken woman said she was looking after her sick husband, Chukwu Mba, when the group left for the trip. She, however, disclosed that her woes were further compounded by the sudden death of her husband immediately he got wind of the disappearance of the four young men on December 31.

"The men were heading to my place in Benue State on two motorcycles through the route that passes Iziogo in Izzi LGA for the traditional marriage of my elder brother's daughter.

"On the particular day though, I was looking after my sick husband, around noon, we interacted on phone but, thereafter, I could not hear from them anymore. In this route, we usually boarded canoes to cross Ebonyi River.

"And based on the way we frequent the place, my children are already conversant with the road because they even came back from there in August last year. This is why I'm suspecting, perhaps, they are being held hostage by some persons.

TRANSIT

"I'm in serious distress as my husband died on December 31, 2021, when he got information concerning the travel. He died of shock associated with the incident.

"Therefore, I'm appealing for intervention from all quarters over their rescue," she said.

Her eldest son, Pius Chukwu, corroborated the story. He said it was after he had contacted their relations in Benue State and discovered that his siblings and others did not get to their destination that he went to the police division at Isu, headquarters of the LGA, and the state police command, Abakaliki, respectively, and reported the matter.

The police confirmed the incident and have since declared the four men missing. Spokesperson for the command, Loveth Odah, in a statement dated January 10, 2022, said a case of missing persons was reported at Onicha divisional headquarters of the command by Okike Onyedikachi of Isiama community, in Onicha LGA.

According to the police, the complainant claimed that "his four brothers left home on 26/12/2021 riding on two motorcycles: Daystar model 125, respectively, to attend a traditional marriage ceremony of their cousin at Okpa-Ogegen village in Oju LGA of Benue State through Effium/Benue route and are yet to return."

Police also said that the celebrant had been contacted and she confirmed that the victims were not sighted at the ceremony.

Odah added that "the command has disseminated the information through its control room and other police formations within the command, yet all efforts made to trace the victims at the time of this publication proved abortive."

Speculations are rife that the four men may have yet become another set of victims of the festering skirmishes between Effium and Ezza Effium communities in Ohaukwu LGA bordering Ebonyi and Benue states, which has claimed many lives.

Recently, five engineers from an Enugu-based consulting engineering firm, Nelan Consultants, on supervisory works on the Abakaliki Ring Road project, went missing in the conflict-torn area.