

FROM ROSE EJEMBI, MAKURDI

**THIS** is one nightmare that Mrs. Juliana Edeki wished she could wake up from. But sadly, the death of her husband, Mr. Sardauna Joseph Edeki, murdered on Thursday, March 10, 2022 allegedly by some yet unidentified herdsmen, has continued to constitute an unending nightmare she may never wake up from.

Mr Edeki was one of the six fishermen that were killed at Ake fishpond in Iye community, Uvir Council Ward of Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. Two other persons were also reportedly killed in Yelwata community in the same local government by rampaging herdsmen suspected to have infiltrated the area from Nasarawa State. Altogether, four Tivs and two Niger-Deltaans were killed.

When *Saturday Sun* visited Edeki's wife at their rented room-and-parlour apartment located at the Rice Mill area of Wadata, Makurdi last Saturday, she was seen weeping profusely while being surrounded by sympathizers, but many of whom found themselves too tongue-tied to talk. Lost for words, in fact, they seemed in need of comforters as they could be seen using their handkerchiefs and wrappers to wipe away tears from their eyes and cheeks intermittently as the widowed mother of six shouted and rolled on the ground while calling her husband's name.

### How my husband died, by wife

The woman later narrated how her husband started the fishpond business about three years ago when things became tough for them economically. But she confessed that since he joined the trade, things had begun to look up for the family before this tragedy struck.

One of his relatives, she revealed, introduced her husband into the business about three years ago. "The relative bought the fishpond and asked my husband to be his eyes there," she said. "At some point, he told me about the Fulani problem in the area but assured me he would be okay. I asked him if the owner of the fishpond was aware. He said he would definitely know because the owner's blood brother was also there in the bush with him. He would go on Monday morning and return every Friday night."

She said she felt uncomfortable with stories she was hearing about the herdsmen's activities in the area and let her husband know her uneasy feeling about the business. But he dismissed her fears. She added that earlier on that Thursday before he met his untimely death, she spoke with him. She told him there was no food in the house. But he asked her to be patient and promised to be home the following day, which was Friday.

Apart from the lack of food, she also informed him about the urgent need to get the bricks they were moulding for commercial purposes burnt. Again, he promised to see to that upon his return on Friday and spoke of the need to add more wood to the one on ground before the bricks could be burnt. Having been so assured, Juliana said she started making preparations for his return. "I got back from our burnt bricks industry in the evening and started cleaning the house in anticipation," she told *Saturday Sun*. "I made new soup, dressed the bed with new bed sheet, washed all dirty clothes and plates because my husband was a very neat person," she recalled.

But the anticipated homecoming never took place, as her husband was killed that night.

She revealed how the sad news was broken to her. "The following morning which was Friday, I was in my room when I saw two women from our neighbourhood coming towards our house while discussing in low tones. I came out and asked them what brought them that way and they told me they were going somewhere close to the river. I bade them farewell. I didn't know that almost everyone in our neighbourhood had heard about my husband's murder except my children and I. After a while, I stood up to go and check out the brick-industry be-



EDEKI AND HIS WIFE

## Death at fishpond

► How six fishermen were allegedly killed by herdsmen in Benue State



EMEKA



JULIANA

cause we had some bricks that were already moulded, waiting to be burnt. While at the industry, I saw one of my husband's nieces coming towards me and my heart skipped a bit. I asked her if everything was all right. And she answered that all was well. She hugged me and I was wondering what the matter was. When we got back to the house, I noticed that her countenance had dropped. I asked what happened. She managed to say all was well. It was then I said she should tell me the truth that my husband had been killed. As soon as I said that, she broke down."

Reports that filtered in from survivors of the attack said that the workers had all gone to the pond to fish that night when the herdsmen swooped on them and started shooting sporadically. She disclosed that it was actually the third time her husband was attacked by suspected herdsmen since he joined the fishing trade. But while he survived the previous two, he couldn't survive this one. She recalled that sometimes last year, the armed attackers went away with his phone and had been using his sim card ever since.

### Recovery of remains and lamentation

Portia, first child of the deceased and who was recently delivered of a child, could not conceal her grief as she broke down when asked to describe her late father. Paradise Odor, late Edeki's cousin-narrated how his

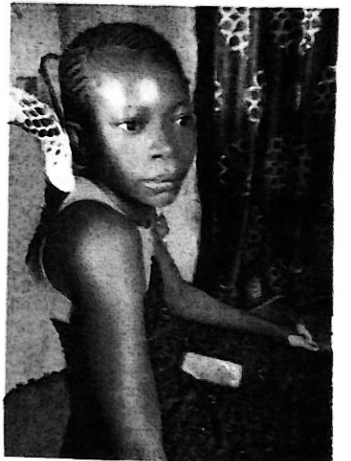
corpse and that of another relative identified as Shagari Okpuwhu were recovered from the bush with the help of troops of Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS). Their remains, he added, had been deposited in the mortuary while emissaries had been sent to Delta State to formally inform the families. The man who said that plans were underway to move the two corpses to Delta State regretted that the fuel scarcity had made that difficult and appealed to the Benue State government and all well-meaning individuals to come to their aid.

From Owodokpokpo-Igbiide clan, in Iso South Local Government Area of Delta State, Edeki, he said, had lived in Benue for over 30 years and had six children there before the sad incident while Okpuwhu had seven. All the same, he is grateful to God for sparing the lives of two of their relatives who were at the fishpond on the day of the attack but managed to escape with minor injuries. But another relative, Sunday Oghenterga who was visibly angry at the gruesome murder of his cousins wondered how long it would take the government to ensure security of lives and property of its citizens. A sympathizer, Emeka Anyaogu lamented that nowhere is safe anymore in Nigeria and urged the Federal Government and the relevant authorities to track and know the person still using Edeki's sim for more than one year after it was seized from him.

It was learnt on Thursday that the remains of the victims had been buried in their home-



ODOR PARADISE



PORTIA

town in Delta State.

### Governor Ortom reacts

Reacting to the attack, Governor Samuel Ortom, in a statement through his Chief Press Secretary, Nathaniel Ikyur, reiterated his call on the Federal Government to step up security operations along the crisis-prone areas of the state.

"The patience of the people who are now victims and rendered homeless by the murderous activities of the Fulani militia should not be tested any longer," he said. "We should not push the victims into looking for self-help because this will not be good for the unity of this country."

He called on the Federal Government to convoke a national security summit of all ethnic nationalities to find a lasting solution to the increasing wave of terrorism that is "gradually tearing up the bond in our nation."