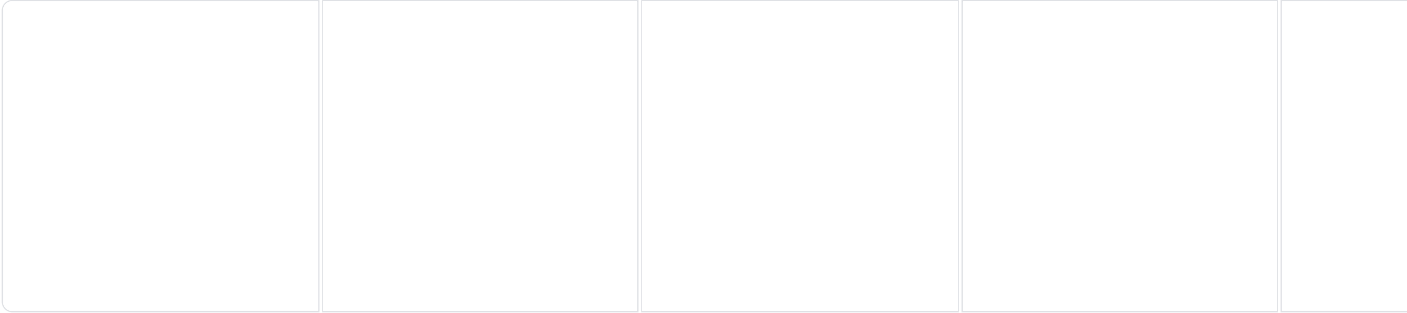


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Mysterious death inside cell

• Confusion as 30-year-old man dies in police custody • For weeks, we kept paying for my brother’s feeding, not knowing he had died • Family seeks justice, deceased’s corpse goes missing

2nd July 2022 in Features

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F THE DEFUNCT SARS AWKWUZU, NOW SCID ANNEX

From **Aloysius Attah**, Onitsha

Until his arrest by policemen from the Ogidi Area Command, Anambra State on February 4, 2022, Chukwunonso Omeh, 30, from Umuogboagu community, Enugu Ezike, Enugu State, lived a simple life as a car washer at Ogbunike former tollgate, near Onitsha.



AIG UMAR MURI

But since that day, all his dreams seem to have evaporated. That was the day any of his family members last set their eyes on Chukwunonso or even heard his voice.

Chukwunonso's elder brother, Onyebuchi Omeh, who was in tears when he visited The Sun office in Onitsha, lamented that the police at the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) Annex, Awkuzu (formerly Awkuzu SARS) might have killed his brother and used his body for some yet to be ascertained purpose.



CHUKWUNONSO OMEH, DIED IN POLICE CUSTODY

Onyebuchi narrated that his brother's journey to death started unfolding after one Augustine Izunwanne, who worked as a manager in a private firm within that Ogbunike axis had, requested the phone contact of one Samson Eze from the deceased.

His words: "That Augustine asked for Samson's phone number from my brother Chukwunonso on the pretext that he had a driving job opportunity for Samson. My brother gave out the number to Augustine, since Samson is from our community. But unknown to my brother, Austin wanted to arrest Samson over a case of conspiracy.

"When Samson was arrested and detained in the police station at Ogidi, Samson's twin brother came and lashed at Chukwunonso for giving out his twin brother's number to someone who arrested him. He threatened my brother that if anything bad happened to Samson at the police station, my brother would be held responsible.

"My brother, after the threat from Samson's twin brother, saw Austin and expressed his annoyance at him (Austin) for obtaining Samson's number just to get him arrested.

"Austin pretended to be sorry about the whole thing and asked Chukwunonso to call Samson's brothers for a peace parley a few days later. He said both him and my brother would go to the police station and secure Samson's release after the peace parley.

"Unknown to my brother, Austin turned around to inform the police that my brother had been threatening him and they arranged to arrest my brother on the day fixed for the peace parley.

"On the actual day, they all assembled at the specified venue but Samson's brothers were very clever enough to notice that some of the men who joined them at the phony peace parley were policemen in plain clothes. They (Samson's brothers) also understood the sign that Austin was giving those policemen at the meeting. They quickly escaped from there. My brother Chukwunonso being so innocent was just there when suddenly the policemen brought out handcuffs from their pocket and arrested him."

Onyebuchi said that he went to Ogidi police station for his brother but the investigating police officer (IPO) told him that they were still investigating a case of threat to the life of Austin against his brother.

Onyebuchi said that when he went to Awkuzu to see his brother, armed policemen at the entrance gate could not allow him access into the place to ask after him. He said that it took several visits to the place before he could be allowed to enter. The policeman on duty, he recalled, told him that there was no one bearing such name in the cell. He also said someone advised him to pay the food vendors beside the facility for his brother's feeding so that they would be taking food to him inside the cell. He said they paid for food for two weeks until the food vendor told him to stop paying again because the cell guards inside the facility said that his brother, Chukwunonso, also known as Chinonso, was no more in the cell.

Petition to Zone 13 Ukp

After a long fruitless search for Chinonso and all efforts to see him proved abortive, the family, through the assistance of one Moses, contacted a lawyer, E. E. Ibekwe of P.U.P. Onuorah Chambers who wrote a petition to the Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG) in charge of Zone 13 Headquarters, Ukp, Anambra State. The petition, a copy of which was obtained by the reporter dated 11th March, 2022 was titled "Arrest and Disappearance of Mr.Chinonso Omeh from the custody of the Nigeria Police Force, Area Command, Ogidi and Anambra State CID Annex, Awkuzu, Anambra State: Production and Release from unlawful custody".

In the petition also copied to the Police Service Commission, the lawyer on behalf of the family urged the AIG to cause for an investigation into the matter and call the police officers involved to order with a view to ensuring justice for Mr Chinonso Omeh and for his subsequent production and release to his family.

Onyebuchi said that some weeks after the petition, they were called to appear at Zone 13, Ukp in respect of the petition where he made a statement to the police and also furnished them with Chukwunonso's picture and other information they required from him.

He said they were called back to Zone 13 where they met with some policemen at the office of a Deputy Commissioner of Police in the zone where they were given the shocking news that their brother Chinonso was already dead.

"We met with the team and some policemen whom we later realised were the IPO and team leader who detained Chinonso at Awkuzu cell. The IPO, Michael Nelson and his team leader whom they call Big Sam said it in our face that Nonso died in the cell under their custody after some days of his detention. They use the word 'He has gone to the world beyond' and when we asked them to explain, they said he died after slumping inside the cell."

70 year-old-man's corpse in exchange for Nonso's body

Onyebuchi said the family raised the alarm when they were told that Nonso was dead but the main shocker was what they saw at the mortuary.

"After the initial shock of hearing the bombshell that Nonso was dead, we recollected ourselves and demanded to be shown his corpse. They arranged to take us to a private morgue around that Awkuzu axis where they said they deposited the body. Before we set out, I noticed that they were uneasy and they also made some calls and discussed with some of their colleague policemen at Awkuzu who went before us to the morgue. I discovered that it was an arranged setup because when we got there, those of their colleagues from Awkuzu had arranged with the mortician there and they brought one dead body, an old man with thick beards who should not be less than 70 years in age.

"We told them that the body was not our brother's but they insisted that he was the one. They also said they were going to do an autopsy but we told them that it's impossible to carry out an autopsy to ascertain the cause of someone's death when you are using a different dead body altogether. We left them in annoyance," he said.

The policemen involved released immediately

Onyebuchi said that their greatest disappointment presently is the fact that the policemen involved in the killing and disappearance of Chukwunonso are now walking freely.

"The next time we went back to Zone 13 to know the next step, we were shocked when we were told that the two policemen involved have been released to go back to their office at Awkuzu and continue in their evil conduct. We asked the investigating policemen why and they told us that their OC at Awkuzu came and requested that they should be released to him. From every indication, we know that our brother died out of torture which is their normal routine at Awkuzu there or they used him for ritual purposes.

^ "If truly he slumped and died like they want us to believe, why didn't they contact us since that February? Even if he is dead, what happened to his body? This cycle of evil and cover-up cannot be allowed to continue in this country. We are calling on the various human

When the reporter contacted the AIG in charge of Zone 13, Umar Muri over this matter, he summoned the investigating team handling the matter and was briefed on the developments so far. He assured the reporter that his command would ensure a thorough investigation and that justice is done on the case.



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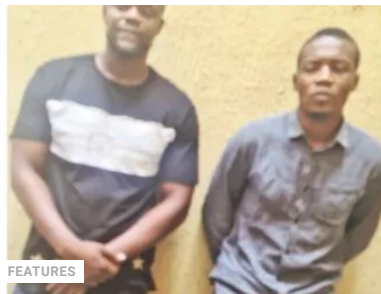
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