

The Lifeline

How mob killed 7 robbers in Abia

From **Okey Sampson**, Umuahia

IN a bid to halt the increasing rate of criminality in Aba, the commercial hub of Abia State, angry residents have resorted to jungle justice.

Within one month, seven suspected robbers have been sent to their early graves.

There have been reports of armed robbery cases around Afor-ule, Umuimo and Kamalu streets axis of Osisioma and areas within Ngwa/Ohanku roads, all in Aba. At those places, the men of the underworld, who operate with military precision, using motorcycles, specialise in snatching tricycles (Keke Napep), robbing point of sale (POS) operators and generally making life hellish for residents.

Their operations have pushed many people to desert the area at nights as residents and traders now close their shops early to avoid being robbed. Due to this development, residents of the city sleep with one eye open.

① On July 3, three daredevil armed robbers who were said to have for long been terrorising the Afor-ule, Umuimo and Kamalu streets axis of Osisioma, Aba again set out for their beastly business.

As a the general saying that every day is for

the thief but one day is for the owner of the house, the robbers went for an operation on the said day, but met their Waterloo.

It was learnt that having successfully carried out their operation or so they thought, and were returning to base, but the unexpected happened.

As fate would have it, after robbing their victims and were fleeing from police team on patrol, the hoodlums were knocked down by a moving vehicle. And as they tried to escape, they were rounded up by some youths in the area.

On finding out that the three men were suspected robbers, the angry youths passed instant judgment and set them ablaze. Before police could arrive the scene, their remains had turned into ashes at Union Bank junction and Star Paper Mill by Kamalu Street where they were burnt.

② Luck ran against the three suspects in less than 24 hours after three other suspected robbers were also killed and their bodies displayed at a spot on Faulks Road, leading towards the Ariaria International Market.

Although information as to what led to the killing of the three young men was sketchy,



•IGP Alkali Baba

but it was gathered that they went on robbery operation the previous night and were caught by a local vigilantes, who later request handed them over to residents of the neighbourhood,

③ who did not waste time in killing and dumping their bodies on Faulks Road. About a month before the two incidents, a young man of about 25, had attempted to

"The mob is the mother of tyrants." -Diogenes

rob a POS operator on Emelogu Street, Ogor Hill, Aba. According to the lady, who operates the cash outlet, the young man had in the previous week, in company with others still at large, robbed her of an undisclosed sum of money.

As the young man came again that fateful day to strike, the POS operator said she was able to identify him and quickly raised the alarm. Immediately, people within the vicinity gathered and took the suspect to the bank of the nearby Aba River and it was learnt he never came back alive.

These were just few of the many cases of jungle justice that have been taking place in the city over the years.

A resident, who spoke on the issue of jungle justice and would not want his name in print, said the method was the easiest and fastest way of getting rid of criminal elements in the society.

According to him, "if those three men that were burnt to death were spared, they would have continued terrorising the city up till now. So, their elimination has reduced crime rate in the area these few days.

"But my suggestion is that before anybody is killed, people will have to make sure that the person actually committed the offence so that an innocent person will not be wasted."

Another resident, who gave his name simply as Eze, said he was in support of instant killing of any criminal caught red-handed,



•Gov. Ikpeazu

but with a caveat that the person must be thoroughly scrutinised to ensure that he or she committed the offence.

He hinged his stand on the fact that instances abound when some criminals were arrested and handed over to police, but were later let off the hook and thereafter returned to continue their criminal activities, some-

times in more dreadful manner.

On the contrary, a security expert, John Ibe, kicked against jungle justice. He said despite the perceived shortcomings of the police and other security agencies in carrying out their statutory functions, the best thing to do is to always hand over suspects to the appropriate authorities irrespective of the magnitude of the offence of such suspects.

He warned that the police would not take any of the reasons adduced for the perpetration of jungle justice.

Police public relations officer in the state SP Geoffrey Ogbonna, said: "This issue of jungle justice, I have made several releases on it, advising people and calling on Abia people to desist from it because it is not the best form of justice. We have seen situations where innocent people are being killed."

He gave a graphic story of how an innocent man, who was wrongly alleged to have stolen a phone, could have been killed.

Hear him: "There was this incident: somebody saw another with a phone which was plugged somewhere, so, seeing that person with his type of phone, he began to raise alarm that the man has stolen his phone, whereas, the man's phone was not stolen.

"If not that somebody came and said Oga, 'your phone is there where you plugged it', they would have killed that innocent man. Because the man saw another man with a phone that looked like his, he raised the alarm which

attracted people and they could have killed the man. So, in carrying out jungle justice, innocent people lose their lives."

He was of the view that the best thing to do when a suspect is apprehended, even if he was caught in the act, was to hand him or her over to the police or any security agency nearby.

With this, Ogbonna reasoned that during interrogation, the suspect may reveal the names of other members of his criminal gang that will be useful to the police.

The spokesperson said: "If you take away that person's life when he was not able to talk to the police or any security agency, other members of the gang might regroup and continue to torment people."

"So, the essence of handing over suspects to security agencies is to enable them to look out for other members of that criminal gang. Jungle justice is not the best and it is not in the constitution because whoever that takes another person's life is guilty and can be charged for murder. So, why do you venture into something that will have an after effect on you?"

On the assertion by some people that when a suspect is apprehended and handed over to the police, he will be set free at the long run, Ogbonna disagreed, saying: "I disagree with them totally because I don't think there's any suspect handed over to the police that police will treat with kid's glove. They are coming up with that to give vent to their wrong doings."