

FROM OKEY SAMPSON,  
UMUAHIA

# Abia community where indigenes are allegedly forced into exile

Many have been tortured and forced out of community, residents claim  
Allegations untrue; we're an NGO doing humanitarian work - Leader of implicated group

**IDIMA** Abam, a community in Arochuku Local Government Area of Abia State, is a sleepy and rustic community located in the South Eastern fringes of the state. The community, according to natives, has known resolute and absolute peace until sometime in 2017, when a group, Red Chamber, emerged in the area.

Red Chamber according to its leader, Dan Oko is a registered non-governmental organisation (NGO), with the sole aim of rendering humanitarian services to the people.

However, natives, particularly those said to be opposed to its activities, reportedly live in fear of the unknown and it is said as at the last count, no fewer than five persons have been allegedly killed, with over 30 natives sent on forced exile by the Red Chamber.

But the Red Chamber has denied such claims, insisting that the group is a registered organisation working hard to make the community excel.

Genesis of problem

Sometime in 2017, some youths were said to have registered a club known as Red Chamber, with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), Abuja. The club, according to information, was registered as a non-governmental organisation (NGO), with the aim of providing humanitarian service as her core objective. But the proponents of the club were alleged to be involved in other activities other than what it was registered for.

On October 21, 2021, a lawyer, Mercy Ojone Ojone, of Ojone & Co. Chamber, Abuja, wrote a petition to the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Force Criminal Investigation Department, Abuja, on behalf of Chukwu Jonah, of Ndi Aworo compound, Idima Abam, stating the alleged atrocities of the Red Chamber, against his client.

The petitioner said since the emergence of the group in Idima Abam in 2017, the community and her law-abiding citizens have not known any peace because of the Red Chamber's alleged nefarious activities.

Chronicling the alleged wrongdoings of the Red Chamber, Ojone wrote, "Sometime in 2017, Chief Innocent Okorie (aka Bobo), an indigene of Ndi Oloko compound, Idima Abam and an uncle to our client was brutally murdered by the Red Chamber cult members and his vital organs removed and sold for ritual purposes. When our client asked of the whereabouts of his uncle, they threatened to kill him as well."

"On August 16, 2018, another community member, Mrs. Olukpe Agwu was again gruesomely murdered by the same cult group, her vital organs were removed and sold and her other remains, burnt and buried in the bush, behind the Assemblies of God Church, Idima Abam. The family members of the said woman, led by her nephew, Mr. Ikechukwu Ofu, duly reported the matter to the police, but sponsors of the group ensured that till date, no member of the group was arrested."

The petition went further to allege that Ikechukwu Ofu, nephew to the murdered Mrs. Olukpe, did not escape the Red Chamber's jungle justice when he was believed to have flouted the law of the cult group, by reporting the murder of his aunt to the police.

The counsel further alleged that two other members of the community, Chief James Iro, popularly known as Akpola and his cousin, Samson Ihueze, were gruesomely killed by the same cult group, their vital organs removed and sold, and their other remains buried in shallow graves in the bush behind the Assemblies of God Church, Idima Abam."

## Other allegations

Apart from Chukwu's petition, Dan Agwu, 70, Daniel Kalu Amuzie, 30, Thomas Otusi Egwu and Thomas Kalu, all from Idima Abam and who spoke with *Saturday Sun*, revealed how they were allegedly maltreated and exiled by the Red Chamber.

A petition written by Dr Chris Okoro, a senior lecturer at Michael Okpara University, Umudike to the Director, State Security Service, Abia State and dated July 17, 2020, also stated how he was allegedly manhandled and forced into exile by the same group.

On July 10, 2022, a group, Concerned Indigenes of Idima Abam, led by Chukwu Jonah, Emmanuel Ogboso and Joseph Iro, did a petition to the Director, DSS, Abia state. In the petition titled, "Petition against the murder of five. Indigenes of Idima Abam, human rights abuses and the carving up of Idima Abam community as a 'Sovereign political entity' by the Red Chamber Cult Group", equally reeled out the alleged nefarious activities of the group.

## Forced exile

Egwu, Amuzie and Kalu, while speaking to the reporter, alleged they were the first set of people exiled from the community by the Red Chamber. Hear them, "We were the first set of youths they dealt with in Idima Abam. After brutalising us, they sent us on forced exile and decreed we should not return until we pay certain amount of money."

They alleged that they had been forced into exile on July 16, 2019.

"Presently, Dr. Okoro is on forced exile, so also is Chief Jones Nnanna Ike, a former chairman of Arochuku Local Government", they alleged.

## Refusal right of burial

According to the petition by the Concerned Indigenes of Idima, the Red Chamber "has since 2016, when the group emerged, systematically seized all the organizational structures of the community thereby concentrating on themselves, the powers of policing, adjudication on judicial matters, punishment on erring community members as perceived by them."



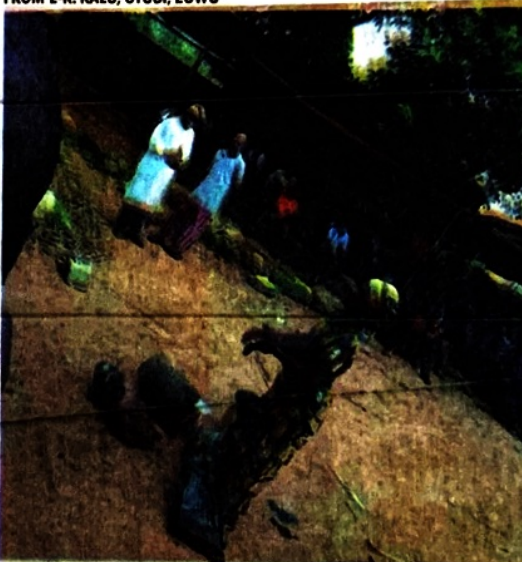
CHUKWU



PA AGWU



FROM L-R: KALU, OTUSI, EGWU



THE WOMAN ALLEGEDLY KILLED BY THE GROUP AFTER SHE WAS ACCUSED OF WITCHCRAFT

The petitioners equally alleged that one Chief Bassey Egbe, said to be a known critic of the Red Chamber group, died as a result of the beatings he received in the hands of members of the group. The group the petitioners said allegedly refused the body to be brought home for burial.

Chief Okorie Joshua Okuruku, 83, was the acting Ezeogo (Village Head), before he was alleged to have been deposed by members of the Red Chamber and sent on exile. He was reported to have died in October this year in exile at Ndi

Oji, Abam and up till moment, the group has allegedly rejected please that his body be brought home for burial.

Equally in this line was the mother of the former Arochuku Local Government Area, Jones Ike, who was said to have died in July this year and the group allegedly rejected plans and pleas by the family that her remains be interred because his son was exiled.

## Call for government

## intervention

The Concerned Indigenes of Idima Abam are calling on Abia State Government and security agencies to wade into the matter and save the people of the area from the hands of the members of the group.

They want the CAC to review the operations of the Red Chamber with a view to withdrawing the certificate issued it.

## Reactions

Reacting to the myriad of allegations against the Red Chamber, its leader, Dan Oko denied the allegations outright. He said, "What we have here is a registered club called Red Chamber, it is legally registered, so, we are not terrorizing anybody. Such allegations must come from enemies who want to destroy our community and tarnish my own image. Our work has limit, we don't go beyond what we can do."

On the people alleged to have been sent on exile by his group, Oko has this to say: "In our community, there is a law that permits us to send you into exile if you commit certain crimes. When you commit such crime, the only thing we can do is to send you on exile, then after three years or thereabouts, if we see changes in you, you apologize, then we forgive you. We have been doing that, I can't deny that one."

Going further Oko said, "Traditionally, there are some cases that we decide in the community, they are not taken to the police or court. The federal law says you should not kill and steal, we don't condole those things in Idima Abam."

He said from time past, cases that are customary in nature are handled internally in the community, stressing that the police are not involved in such matters.

"What we are doing here is humanitarian work. Red Chamber only acts based on the decision of the entire community", he said.

Oko informed that there are other clubs in the community, and wondered why it is only the Red Chamber that is being attacked.