

## CITYSTRINGS

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## Ohaji Community's Tears for Justice

The politically motivated killing of Mr. Matthew Odunze in Ohoba Community, during the presidential and National Assembly elections should be properly investigated writes **Obinna Chima**



Obosima market



**N**igeria's recently concluded general elections might have been largely described as peaceful, by both by local and foreign observers, but the pockets of violence and even killings associated with the exercise has thrown the families of those affected into sorrow, agony and pain.

For instance, in Ohoba, a predominantly farming community in Ohaji/Egbema local government area of Imo State, the elections could be said to be anything but peaceful because of the gruesome murder of their son, Matthew Odunze, nicknamed Alaye on March 28th, when the presidential and National Assembly elections were held.

Alaye, a motorist, who drives an Imo Transport Company Limited bus, hails from Umukpoche Village in Ohoba. This unfortunate incidence has thrown his pregnant wife, immediate family and the entire community into confusion as they continue to seek for justice.

Some members of the community also called on the National Human Right Commission (NHRC), Civil Liberty Organization (CLO) and other human right groups to investigate the gruesome murder of their kinsman.

The murder of Alaye occurred on a day he offered to assist officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), who were stranded after the election on this fateful day.

According to an eye witness, after ballots had been cast on the day of the National Assembly and presidential elections and the results generated from various polling booths, INEC's ward supervisor instructed that all the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, the result sheets and others materials should be moved to the collation centre. But unfortunately, the two buses that were hired by INEC to assist in conveying the items had been moved to Obosima and Amafor, two neighbouring communities in Ohaji, probably to convey the NYSC members and materials in those two communities.

The source said the INEC ward supervisor was scared of going to Ohoba because he had been allegedly attacked by some thugs that are loyal to a particular political party when he went to the community earlier on that day, and so he was afraid of returning to the community.



Late Odunze

"So he called on some of the observers around to help arrange a bus to convey the result sheets that had been signed by the respective political agents, the ballot boxes and the NYSC members to Obosima, so that they can be moved to Egbema. So, we beckoned on Alaye to assist. He opted to assist by bringing out his bus and we paid him a token. While he was driving his bus, we were in another car, driving behind him.

"So, when we got to Alaka village, we two Jeep cars drove past us and after some time, we received phone calls from those we left at the collation centre in Ohoba, that we should be very careful because the people in the jeeps asked after the NYSC members, the ballot boxes and the INEC officials. They also made us to know that from the way they were asking about us, they may be out on a negative mission," the source who preferred to remain anonymous added.

Although, he said while he got the phone calls, he tried to alert the late bus driver to be careful, but was not picking his calls because he was driving.

Continuing he said: "So when we got to

Obosima junction, instead of us taking the direction to Owerri, we went to a different direction. So, when we got to a particular compound, what we did was to park the vehicle and switched off the light. This was happening around 8pm.

"But because the young man who was driving the bus didn't know what was happening, he discovered very late that people were trailing him and he also ran into another compound and hid somewhere. The murderers came down, searched for him, got him where he was hiding, beat him up and poured sort of a chemical on him and he died. He was not shot. That was how Alaye was killed."

However, the family of the deceased are begging for justice and they have appealed to well-meaning Nigerians not to allow the death of their son to be swept under the carpet.

Speaking to THISDAY, Chief Rowland Nwaoha, the late Odunze's brother appealed to the Inspector General of Police to intervene.

"It is something shocking. We never expected it because the young man, married and in his 40s was not contesting an election, but was just assisting INEC. But is appeared that the

opponent of the party that won, that is the opponents of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) we suspect, traced him and murdered him at Obosima.

"The NYSC members with him were not touched. So, it appeared that they had a list of people they wanted to eliminate, but unfortunately this young man ran into them. I strongly believe because he knew some of them, they just wanted to assassinate him so that he will not implicate them.

"This is because when they were chasing him, he drove into a compound and parked the vehicle there and ran into somewhere to hide. But, while he was still hiding there, these murderers went to the compound, forced members of that family to identify where he was and they got him and it appeared that they used acid on him, which killed him immediately," Nwaoha added.

Although, he said the matter had been reported to the police station at Umuagwo in Ohaji, he called for thorough investigation by security agencies for timely unravelling of the culprits.

"I am inviting the government to intervene because it is not good to be murdering people at will, especially innocent souls. The victim was not a principle actor in the election and I don't see why he should be killed. I am asking that the government should come to our aid and make sure the truth is unveiled. Let the culprit be brought to book. INEC and PDP should kindly intervene," he appealed.

When THISDAY contacted the state police public relations officer, Mr. Andrew Enwerem, a Divisional Police Officer (DPO) on the matter, he said the police has commenced investigation.

"I can assure you that we are aware of the matter and we have commenced investigation, that is what I can say for now," he said in a telephone chat.

Also, another member of the Odunze family, Pastor Martins Odunze called for the cooperation of members of the community so as to achieve justice.

"We need justice. We reported to the police at Umuagwo and in no distant time, police at the federal level would also be contacted because of the people involved. He also appealed to human right groups in the country to be interested in the matter to ensure that justice takes its course.