

Chijindu noted: “It was then we realised that it was a death sentence.”

He continued: “After that week, one of us, Ifeanyi, was bailed, leaving nine of us behind. Before the end of that second week, four, among us died; Okechukwu, Uchenna, Uchechukwu and Chinedu. Their corpses were left with us in the cell until the policemen were ready to evacuate them.”

Chijindu further revealed that on the third week, three persons died; Ngirima, Victor Azubuike and Ojoto. Two among the corpses were moved after a full day in the cell with the suspects, while Ojoto’s corpse was left in the cell with the suspects for three days before it was evacuated. Chijindu said that the corpse Ojoto was already decomposing before it was removed.

“When the policemen were taking Ojoto’s remains away, I heard them saying, “this one has decayed; there is no need to take him to Akwuzu, let’s bury him here”. I managed with the little energy left in me to stretch and peep through our tiny window. I watched and saw how they buried Ojoto beside a soak-away-pit at the back of their office there in Neni,” said Chijindu.

On Easter Sunday, one of the officers came to attend to suspects in the cells. He told the suspects that their commander would celebrate Easter for them. Alas, nothing was given to them.

The following day, which was Easter Monday, while Chidinju was praying, he heard the last breath leaving the body of Tochukwu. The suspects alerted the policemen and Tochukwu’s corpse was moved.

But before Tochukwu died, two new suspects had joined them in the cell. They are Ifeanyi Mba and Ekene Nwoke. They were both transferred from Akwuzu. When Tochukwu died, Ifeanyi and Ekene started crying.

A week after the death of Tochukwu, there were moves to bail one of the new suspects, Chijindu secretly handed him a piece of paper. The paper contained information on how to locate his sister and the direction to his home in Nnewi.

The young man fulfilled his promise; he located the home and family of Chijindu. He disclosed to them, the horror Nigerians were passing through in SARS detention facilities. Chijindu family contacted Human Right activists. It was discovered that Chijindu family members didn’t know he was in detention. They had been looking for him, almost about to declare him missing. Chijindu family and the activists started making frantic efforts to get him out.

They were further worried after hearing that he had a gunshot wound on his leg, which was festering. Chijindu said: “The human right people went to Awkuzu and asked after me, the OC SARS called the Station Officer in Neni, who was behind our cell taking his call. The OC reprimanded the commander for allowing us to survive. I overheard their conversation because the SO phone was on speaker. The OC accused them of giving us food.

The SO denied the accusation. Then the SO and his men brought all of us out and started flogging us. They were mad at me. They searched everywhere, looking for writing materials or phone, with which I communicated to the outside world. They couldn’t find anything. They threatened to bring me out and “finish” me. On April 24, 2017, around 9:30pm, police came to Neni and took me to Awkuzu.

“The following day, which was a Tuesday, policemen brought me out to the see the OC SARS. The OC asked me if I was Chijindu, I said yes. He openly expressed shock that I survived Neni.

The OC then asked me whether I had eaten anything, I said no. He asked me what I wanted to eat, I told him that I wanted liquid as I found it very difficult to swallow. He asked them to go and get me tea with bread.

The following day they took me to Magistrate’s Court at Nteje.”

When Chijindu was arraigned, it was discovered that there was no complainant, no witness. He also didn’t have legal representation. The police charged him for armed robbery. The Magistrate referred the case to high court.

The New Telegraph Newspaper, had earlier chronicled an award winning piece on the killings of suspects and other atrocities committed by SARS men across Nigeria. The chronicle was recognized and applauded by the Wole Soyinka Centre of Investigative Journalism.

The atrocities in SARS had spanned many Inspectors-Generals of Police, but it is on record, that former IGP, Solomon Arase rose against such horrendous activities. It was also during his administration that some SARS men were dismissed for killing detainees and other shocking acts. Immediately Arase left the throne, the Force went back to its old ways of flagrant impunities.

The Amnesty International Nigeria researcher, Mr Damian Ugwu, reacting to those support SARS activities, said: “It was disheartening to see pictures of young man and women in Port Harcourt and Abuja, carrying banners in support of SARS. I often wonder how far some Nigerians are willing to go to survive. Most worrisome is that some people who claimed to represent Anambra State were also part of the charade. For the record Anambra State is the home of SARS Awkuzu.”