




METRO AND CRIME

My story of evangelism, kidnapping and robbery, by Nwoke



Published 2 days agoon June 23, 2018
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...how top NNPC official died after we collected ransom in dollars

Following the arrest of the kidnapping gang which allegedly abducted and killed a senior staff of the Nigeria National Petroleum Cooperation (NNPC) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State by operatives of the Inspector General of Police Intelligence Response Team (IRT), shocking confessions have come forward on how the gang shot and buried the corpse of John Iheanacho, who was also President of Eastern Zone of Investment Cooperative Society Limited in a shallow grave.



How victim died after we collected ransom from his wife

The kidnappers, despite killing Iheanacho, still went ahead to collect hundreds of dollars from his frantic wife as ransom in two tranches. After collecting the first tranche, the gang leader, Prosper Nwoke stayed firm on the demanded of a N30 million balance instead of releasing him.

While waiting to receive the balance, Iheanacho's gunshot wound became infested with maggots. Just as the victim's wife arranged the second tranche of the ransom, Iheanacho died.

A police source, who spoke on how the remains of Iheanacho were recovered by IRT operatives, said: "Two among the four suspects involved in the kidnap and murder of Iheanacho led IRT men to a forest where he was buried.

He was buried in a shallow grave in Abia State after being shot by his abductors and taken to an uncompleted building in a community in Ndoki, Oyigbo Local Government Area of Rivers

State, where he died of bullet wounds.”

The leader of the IRT, a Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Mr Abba Kyari, listed Samuel Ikechukwu Alexander a.k.a Pillar, Chima Mark, Stephen Iniobong and Teddy Ifeanyi as although members of the gang that collected a huge ransom in dollars before killing their victim.

Kyari noted that the four-man gang, from the southern states of Abia, Imo, Akwa Ibom and Rivers, had also abducted two female victims alongside the NNPC official. He further disclosed that the two female victims were raped and later made to pay N1.5m each before they were released. Others arrested in connection with the abduction and subsequent murder of Iheanacho is Prosper Nwoke, Teddy Ifeanyi, Chikere Eleke, Stephen Iniobong, Chima Mark, Samuel Ikechukwu and Fabiyawari Marcus.

The corpse of Iheanacho, which had been buried for 93 days, was exhumed and deposited in the mortuary. The late NNPC employee was abducted in front of his residence at Iriebe area of Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

“Iheanacho was shot while his kidnappers were attempting to abduct him. He was kept captive in an environment that was not conducive for his health and injury. The kidnappers’ camp is located inside the swampy Umuosi community in Afam area of Oyigbo,” the police source added.

I was an evangelist before I became a kidnapper

28-year-old Prosper Nwoke, a father of four from Abia State is the gang leader. He told the police that he was a deeply religious man before he turned to crime and that they have a

routine of praying before any operation.

“I was an evangelist before I became a kidnapper. I can preach and quote every part of the bible off heart. If police can give a last chance, I’ll never return to crime again! We usually say our prayers before embarking on any operation.

We pray so that God will take policemen off our way and stop any confrontation with them.” Not the first time he would be arrested, his first stint in detention made his wife walk out of their marriage in 2016. He was sent to prison but rather than be reformed, Nwoke became acquainted with deadly criminals and came out of prison to become a kingpin. “My wife left after I was arrested and taken to Port Harcourt Prison.

I went into crime in the year 2016. Before then, I was selling fairly used clothes. While doing this business, I lived with my elder brother at Choba area of Port Harcourt. He later relocated to Sierra Leone and I moved out of his house and rented an apartment at Afam area of Oyigbo,” he said.

Nwoke said he went to a night club at Second Artillery area of Port Harcourt one day and met a certain Anele who introduced him into armed robbery and kidnapping. “Anele was a big spender at that night club. I admired and later made him my friend.

I asked him the kind of job he was into. He claimed to be a businessman. We got closer and he confessed that he was into armed robbery and kidnapping.

He said that I could join if I was interested. Since I needed money to fend for my wife and children, I accepted Anele’s offer. He linked me to two other members of his gang, East-Man and Gift,” Nwoke recalled. Nwoke was taken to operations and he took to the job like duck to water as he shared: “We once attacked a residential estate on Artillery area of Port Harcourt.

We went with two guns and robbed occupants of the estate of their phones and laptops. We took the stolen items to one Alhaji at Presidential Hotel juncture off Aba Road in Port Harcourt to sell them. I don't know the amount Anele got from the Alhaji but I was given N25,000.

I took the money to Oyigbo Market and bought some foodstuff. A week later, policemen arrested Anele who led them to my house and they arrested other gang members also. Police took Alhaji to his house and recovered all the stolen items which were returned to their owners and we were later granted bail.

"I went back to selling fairly used clothes. Two weeks later, one of my friends at Oyigbo, Chima, came to tell me that his friend, Available, had been disturbing him about an operation.

The operation was to kidnap a woman and Chima said that Available needed someone who would complete the gang. I brought in Anele and his two friends and linked them up to Available. After careful planning, Anele brought out his guns and we waylaid the woman on her street at Oyigbo. We kidnapped her and took her to an Island in Umuosi Community in Afam area of Rivers State. One of my friends, Chikere, was the person who provided the camp as Anele gave Chikere some money to provide food and other items we would need in caring for the hostages.

Anele was also the person communicating with the woman's husband." Nwoke said that four days after the woman's abduction, Anele said ransom had been paid by her husband, of which he got N100,000 as the woman was released. But while he used his share to buy a bale of fairly-used clothes, a quarrel between Anele and the other guys got police involved and they were arrested them, spending 13 months in prison before being granted bail in December 2017.

While in prison, he got wind of a criminal called Italian who had many of his boys in the Port Harcourt Prison at the time and he was linked by a cellmate and they met later.

“I told him that I needed his help, I had no work. He asked me to meet him at Okrika. He accommodated me. I saw several men at his home; men I had earlier met in prison. I spent a month with him.

One of his boys, Ahoda Unit- Head, said that we should ask for rifles from Italian. When we went to Italian, he said we must bring his ‘return’ on any operation we carried out with the gun. He gave us a rifle; we took it to Afam and gave it to Chikere to keep. I started looking for an operational vehicle.

“We kidnapped a woman in December 2017, kept her for four days and her husband paid us N200, 000 and we released his wife. In January 2018, we went for another operation, kidnapping a man making calls in a Mercedes Benz 4Matic. The man spent six days with us before his family paid N1.7million ransom,” he narrated.

How senior staff of NNPC was shot, abducted

Nwoke said they all went underground for two months until March 2018 when the gang regrouped and went in search of victims. “Around Aba Road in Port Harcourt, we saw a Toyota car and the driver was driving into the estate. We suspected that the occupant must be a very rich person. We quickly went after the car and followed the man until he got to his gate. I came out with my gun and ordered him to step out of his car.

Ti-money and others held him but he started struggling. He asked us his offence was, I told him that we were kidnappers, that all we wanted was his money. While I was saying this, some

of the vigilante men started approaching. I went close to the man and he suddenly grabbed my rifle. He started struggling with me. I didn't know what happened next, but I fired two shots.

The man got hit on the knee and we took him and his vehicle away. On our way to Chikere's community, we saw a woman driving a Toyota Four Runner, and then we went after her and also kidnapped her.

We took her and the wounded man to the Island across Chikere's Community and kept them there. I took the man's vehicle to Aba, and then Stephen called someone from the prison that linked us to someone in Aba.

The person bought the two vehicles. "I used the money to buy food items and drugs for the hostages. We asked Iheanacho to pay N50m ransom but he said he would pay N5m but later asked his wife to increase the money to N6m. Four days later, his wife brought the money to Mbaise area of Imo State. I was on top of a tree, monitoring him. He dropped the money inside a tree.

We moved immediately to Aba and the husband of the woman in our camp brought N1m. We went to a bar in Aba, leaving the money with Junior. Junior actually came to assist us in collecting the ransom; he ran away with our money."

Leader insisted on N30m ransom while maggots festered in victim's wound

As the victim remained with them wounded and untreated, the operation was becoming more complicated as narrated by a member of the gang. "Iheanacho heard our conversation and told me to call his wife.

He asked her to pay the balance of N3m, so that he could leave the place. She told me that she doubted if that would be possible because my boss had reduced the ransom from N50m to N30m and after collecting the first N3m she gave to him, that he had since been demanding a balance of N27m. She said that if I was sure that I would release her husband after collecting the N3m balance that I should come out of the camp to pick the money.

I told Marcus and Stephen what the woman said. Marcus said he would follow me. By the evening of the sixth day, we left the camp. I went to sleep in a hotel, till the next day. I went to my house at UST and changed into clean clothes. I called the woman and told her that I was out of the camp. She asked me to speak with her brother-in-law, which I did.

“They said they were heading to the bank. I waited until nightfall, I didn’t hear from her. When I called her, she said that she couldn’t raise the money. Marcus and I went back home. I couldn’t call Stephen whom I had left at the camp because I asked him to switch off his phone so that Prosper wouldn’t reach him,” he said.

The following morning, Ifeanyi called Mrs. Iheanacho and she begged him to give her till 4pm, when she would have sorted all issues with the bank. By 4: pm, Ifeanyi called and she said that the manager wanted to speak with Ifeanyi.

The manager asked Ifeanyi if he was sure he would release Iheanacho after payment of the ransom, he said yes. Ifeanyi said: “I didn’t hear from them again until the next day, which was the ninth day.

The man’s brother told me that the only money he was able to raise, was N2.2m. I told him not to bother about the balance that he should bring the N2.2m. I gave them directions to where they should drop the money. When I picked the money and counted it, it was \$6.200.

I and Marcus headed straight to the camp. When we got there, we couldn't find anyone. I was shocked. I went deeper into the camp and saw Steven and the female captive. I asked about Iheanacho, he told me that the man was dead.

He said that when he woke up that morning, he tapped Iheanacho to wake him so he that he could brush and take his drugs, but he remained motionless. "He said that when the woman returned after brushing her mouth, she discovered Iheanacho wasn't moving. She fell down and started crying.

He had to switch on his phone to call Chikere. Chikere asked him to take the woman deeper into the forest. He brought a shovel, dug a shallow grave and buried the man faced down. I told them that we should move out.

The woman started crying, begging us to help her to leave the place. When we got out of the Island, we made our way to the tarred road. We got a bus that took us to Oyigbo.

When we got to the bus stop, I bought slippers for the woman and gave her N2,000 for transportation back to her house. She gave me her phone number, her home and school addresses. She asked me to call her that she would reward me with the N400,000. She left and I went back to Marcus and Stephen.

We shared the \$6,200. I got \$2,000, Marcus got \$2,000 with Stephen going with \$1,500. The rest was shared among people who heard about the operation at Afam area. I went and changed my own money. I bought over the barber shop in UST and furnished it. I felt relaxed, thinking all was well. Before I left Marcus and Stephen, I had asked them to go their separate ways and I destroyed their phones and mine as well.

Two weeks later, I was sleeping in my house when someone knocked on the door. I opened and saw some policemen who called me by nickname Ti-Money with Chima, Stephen and Samuel with them. They asked if I knew them, I said yes and proceeded to tell them all I knew about the abduction and gang members.”

How leader’s lover caused his first arrest, prison journey

The story of 27-year-old Chikere Ekere, married to a wife who is eight months pregnant, is not too different from others. His journey into crime began in 2016 when he met Prosper.

He met Prosper through a friend called Eze as the former was always throwing money around. Chikere said: “Eze told me that Prosper was an importer. There was this time I went to see Eze and saw Prosper with a gun. I quickly told Eze; it was then that Eze told me that Prosper wasn’t really an importer. He told me Prosper was into armed robbery and kidnapping. Eze said that I could join the group and make good money.”

A week later, Eze called Chikere and told him that Prosper had a victim and that he needed somewhere to keep him. He said that Prosper wanted Chikere to assist them get a place in his community. Chikere took them into the bush. Eze was in charge of preparing food for the kidnappers and victims. Chikere said: “One week later, the man was released and Prosper gave me N100, 000. One month after, Prosper brought another victim. When I took them to the spot where we had kept the first victim, we discovered that the owners of the land had farmed on it. It was an open space. He suggested I should take the men across the river.

I brought an Akwa Ibom boy who knew how to paddle a boat to take us across. I was also the person supplying food and water to them. The victim spent 10 days. Prosper called that I should return everyone to the mainland.

I did and he gave me N100,000 and the boat boy was given N50,000. One month after that operation, some Department of State Security (DSS) operatives came to Eze's house, seeking Prosper. They arrested Eze and his younger brother who assisted Prosper to rent an apartment for one of Prosper's girlfriends.

It was through the girlfriend that the DSS operatives arrested Prosper. He told the police that Eze and his brother were not members of his gang and didn't know he was into crime. Eze and his brother were released while Prosper was sent to prison. In December 2017, Eze told me that Prosper had been released. He came to my community, asking why I didn't pay him a visit in prison. I gave him N2,000 and he left. By January 2018, he brought another man and asked me to look for a boat boy.

I brought in Marcus, who paddled the victims across the river. They kept the man for seven days." When the ransom for that operation was paid by the family of the victim, Chikere said he was given N150, 000 as Marcus got N100, 000 for his efforts. Their next operation, according to him, was the abduction of Iheanacho.

"Prosper called me after they had abducted Iheanacho and a woman. I discovered that the man was injured. I told him that it would be wrong to take the injured man into the camp.

The man clearly needed urgent medical attention. Prosper ordered us to take the man into the bush. Prosper gave me N1000 to buy Becham and Ampiclox, pain reliever and Sprite drink for the man. I bought the drugs and took it to Ti-Money.

Ti-money also used hot water on the man's wound. Two days later, Prosper went to market and bought lots of food items. Ti-Money called me, Marcus and Steven, and told us that he had spoken to the man's wife. She said that Prosper was demanding N50m. He said that he had told the woman to pay N6m.

Ti-money wanted us to collect the money and share. He said that Prosper was greedy and would cheat us. I panicked when I heard what Ti-Money was planning. I told him that Prosper had once threatened to kill my mother and wife if I ever betrayed him. Since Marcus and I were the only people who could take them out to the shore, I told them that I won't work with them.

After Prosper collected the money, we started calling him to come and free the victims, but he refused. Prosper became too greedy and refused to release the injured man.

A few days before the man died, Marcus came to me. He said that he wanted to go to Port Harcourt to visit his mother, he left. When the man died, I had to bury him," he said. Like almost everyone involved in crime, they are now seeking a second chance.

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