

# Plateau community buries vigilantes allegedly killed by military, demands justice



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Tears flowed as three vigilante members allegedly shot death by operatives of Operation Safe Haven (OPSH), a Military Task Force in charge of internal security in Plateau State and its environs, were given a community burial at Kwi village in Riyom Local Government Area of Plateau State.

The Kwi community had alleged that the Special Task Force officials had on April 20, 2019, arrested 17 vigilante members in Kwi village, near Jos Airport, Plateau State. The victims were Elisha Yakubu Bot , Joshua Dung and Bot Bulus Rwang, members of a vigilance group in Kwi community.

Saturday Telegraph gathered that the young men lost their lives when two persons from a neighbouring community were attacked on Saturday 20 April, 2019 by suspected herdsmen in Kwi village where one person lost his life while another escaped.

The surviving person raised the alarm for help which attracted the vigilante to the scene. But when the military, stationed in the community, arrived shortly after the vigilante, they started shooting sporadically. One of the victims of the alleged military attack who survived, 25-yearold Madaki Shedrack, told Saturday Telegraph that 17 of them were arrested by the OPSH Operatives of Sector 9 and three persons among them were inflicted with gunshots injuries.

Shedrack said: “14 of us were taken to Sector 9 at Makera in Riyom and the three injured persons were taken to the hospital for treatment. We were taken to the headquarters of Operation Safe Haven the following morning and we couldn’t see three of our colleagues.

“The military kept us in their custody for about one month until we were transferred to the Police Headquarters, Jos, where our statements were taken and we were subsequently released without seeing three of our members.” Another victim name Samuel Dung age 26 said men of Operation Safe Haven arrived several minutes late to the scene of the attack and didn’t asked question regarding what happened but started shooting and arresting indiscriminately. “Without a question, they started shooting at us,” he said. He said after seeing three of the vigilantes gunned down, they surrendered and were taken into custody, leaving behind the corpse of their tribesman killed by the initial suspected herdsmen attackers. “They took us to their Sector 9 base before moving us to the STF Headquarters in Jos and called us robbers, we were tortured for months Dung said.

“The first day, they tortured us for more than five hours, beating us mercilessly and pouring water on us,” Dung narrated. Wife of late Elish Yakubu Bot, Mrs Martha, 38, and mother of six cried and wailed until she almost passed out and was revived and consoled by the villagers who were also crying uncontrollably.

She said her husband was an active farmer and member of the vigilante before he was allegedly killed by the military. She called on Federal Government to investigate the alleged killings of three vigilante members including her husband whose corpses were dumped at Bingham University Teaching Hospital, Jos. “I will not

accept this injustice; people who are paid by Federal Government to protect innocent persons are the ones killing them. My husband was only doing community service, why will he be killed? I want the Federal Government to provide my husband alive and take decisive action on the perpetrators,” she cried.

Saturday Telegraph gathered that the Kwi community engaged a lawyer who advised them to carry out autopsy at the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH) to identify how they died. The corpses were released to the community on November 13, for mass burial at the village Kwi.

Family members, lawyers and community stakeholders were denied access to the detainees until they were transferred to Police custody several months later. The Director, Emancipation Centre for Crisis Victims in Nigeria, Solomon Dalyop, while Speaking during the burial said the community would seek legal redress on the matter He said the three vigilantes believed to have died in custody, investigation revealed, were donated to Bingham University Teaching Hospital Jos as cadaver.

“We wrote several letters and petitions before the 14 were released in August. The Task Force denied knowledge of their whereabouts but after a thorough and vigorous search, we learnt their corpses were donated to Bingham University Teaching Hospital for research,” he said.

“They killed our youths for responding to a situation that they couldn’t respond to, and they never responded to our letters demanding their whereabouts. “It is a concealment of act of extrajudicial killing which is never within the contemplation of the Nigerian laws and we will be left with no option than to seek legal redress, the murder however does not just have legal but social and economic implications. He said the community wrote the OPSH headquarters two times to provide the three vigilantes alive or dead but there was no response from them. Also, a stakeholder from the community and Former Rector of the Plateau State Polytechnic Dr. Dauda Gyemang said: “The killing of our youths by people who are supposed to guard us shows that our children have no hope for the future.”

Former Commissioner of Finance in Plateau State and community Leader, Hon. Davou Mang, said the persistent conflicts and culpability of the security have caused fear thus preventing people from working thereby increasing hardship for the locals.

He said the community together with the families embarked on the search for the corpses from one mortuary to the other until the corpses were found at Bingham University Teaching Hospital in August. He said the hospital management told the community that the corpses were deposited there on April 21, 2019, by members of the Operation Safe Haven (OPSH). Our correspondent observed that tears flowed freely and emotions were high when the corpses arrived the community from Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH) for burial.

Efforts to speak with the spokesperson of the Operation Safe Haven (OPSH), Major Shittu Adebajo, proved abortive as he did not respond to his calls. Messages sent to his phones were similarly not responded to. Efforts to reach the Bingham University Teaching Hospital, Jos, were equally unsuccessful as the Managing Director, Prof Edwin Eseigbe, who is the only person authorised to speak on behalf of the hospital did not respond to our correspondent’s questions. He maintained that the hospital had already explained to the family what

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