

## How Anti-One Chance Squad police officers killed our father –Sons

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 May 23, 2020  YEKEEN AKINWALE


It is gradually but steadily becoming a norm, the rate at which arbitrary executions are being perpetrated by personnel of the Nigerian Police Force, and other law enforcement officers saddled with the task of protecting the citizens. This, according to this report by YEKEEN AKINWALE, calls for urgent government attention

Steven, (28) and Chinonso, (26), both sons of late Eze Solomon, are heart broken. So is their mother, who lives in a village in Anambra State, and the rest of the family. Sunday, May 10, will forever remain a dark, unforgettable day in their memories. It was the day life was snuffed out of their 68-year-old father allegedly by a police officer at Ereke junction in Karimo area of Abuja.

The sudden end of their father has become one reality they have to live with forever. "I'm totally confused," Steven told our reporter, looking downcast. "I'm still in shock because the whole thing happened like a film to me. I saw my father but in the next 10 minutes, they called me that he was shot."

His brother, Chinonso said he was at home when he got a call that his father had been shot dead. He added: "I was at home when someone rushed in to inform me that police officers shot my father dead. When I got there I saw my dad lying lifeless in the pool of his blood. I rushed to Karimo Station and made a complaint there.

The police came with a Hilux and took him to the mortuary." There was no inkling early in the day that the man, who just concluded a threeday dry fasting and requested for food, was about to die. But the tragedy struck!

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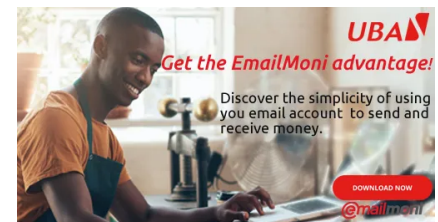
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The late father of six had in the morning held a house fellowship with members of his church, The Overcoming World Assembly, in his apartment. He waited till the evening for his first son, Steven, to bring him food to end the three-day dry fasting.

That would have been his last meal on earth. But, Solomon never lived to eat the food. It was alleged that in the evening of that fateful Sunday, a group of six police officers, some dressed in mufti, others in police bulletproof vests, and an informant had arrived at Karimo to arrest some traders.

The officers were believed to be operatives of Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), though it later turned out that they were from the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Anti-One Chance Squad. They were said to be carrying out random arrests of suspected criminals within the neighbourhood.

They allegedly came in company of an informant, who goes by the name, Lucky, but who is popularly known as Confusion. It was the arrest of Monday Chukwu, a fashion boutique owner by the operatives that led to Solomon's death.

Chukwu said he was pinpointed by Confusion before the operatives came to his shop to arrest him. He said: "I was at my shop on that fateful Sunday about 5:30pm, when some cars parked in front of the shop. I was thinking that they were customers.

Three men came down from the car with sticks in their hands. I innocently ushered them in thinking they were customers. I was wrong. Instead of checking for items to buy like I expected, they held me by the waist, and ordered me to close my shop.

"As the unfortunate drama unfolded, three policemen with guns, wearing bulletproof vests emerged from another car and asked me to comply. There and then, they started hitting me with their sticks that I should close the shop."

While he was being forced into the car, Chukwu insisted he should be taken to a police station instead. He asked Confusion why he implicated him. By this time, a crowd had gathered to intervene, pleading with the policemen to take Chukwu to the station. Among the crowd was late Solomon, who was said to be returning from where he had gone to check his shop, which had been brought down by rainstorm the previous night.

He was said to have intervened as an elderly family friend, begging the police to take Chukwu to the nearby police station. But his pleas went unheeded, and he paid dearly with his life as the leader of the squad allegedly ordered one of his boys to do 'his work.'

The late Solomon, who sold fairly used clothes and bags at the Ereke junction, was allegedly shot straight in the head and died instantly. "During the process, one of the officers, who I suspected is their boss, came down from the car and said, 'don't they know their work, they should take action now'. "He brought out his gun and faced the direction of people arguing that they should take me to the station and shot at one man there.

He shot directly into his eye," Chukwu added. After the shooting, the leader of the squad, eyewitnesses told Saturday Telegraph, zoomed off in his car while his boys forced Chukwu into the second car. He was not taken to any police station. Rather, Chukwu said he was dropped off along Airport Road after the operatives took N15, 500 from him without telling him his offence. "At the Airport Road, the boss said that they should release me because 'Confusion' said I didn't have anything to do with him. They returned my phone but went away with my money, a sum of N15, 500, and left me in the middle of the road," Chukwu said.

Traders at the market said the police informant, who they know as 'Confusion,' has over the years been implicating innocent traders with the police. A trader, who once fell victim

of his act, narrated his experience to Saturday Telegraph. "Confusion comes around Karimo and Dape.

His real name is Lucky." said the boutique owner, who did not want to be named for security reasons. This victim was arrested right inside his shop by operatives of the Squad after he was pointed at by 'Confusion,' alleging that he had bought a stolen phone from him.

The trader said he "paid through his nose" to bail himself after he was taken to the detention facility of SARS at Abattoir area of Abuja. He added: "This is not the first time they are doing something like this. Last two years, they came to my shop and arrested me for no reason.

I spent N110, 500 to bail myself from what I did not do. I was taken to Abattoir. They alleged that I bought a handset from him while I did not buy anything from him. They found nothing on me. I bailed myself out that very day. They took my home theatre and never returned it."

When contacted, FCT Police Public Relations Officer, Anjuguri Manza, said the matter was being investigated. "Investigation is ongoing on the matter; the command commiserates with the family of the deceased and promises to make its findings public.

The command also promises to be transparent in its investigation of the issue," Manza further said. He confirmed to our reporter that the officer who shot the deceased had been identified and arrested, noting that the command issued a statement to that effect.

The police spokesperson declined comments on the identities of the officers involved and what punishments await them if found guilty. Meanwhile, a human rights lawyer, Maxwell Okpara, who has been following up on the case, also confirmed that the principal suspect had been arrested, alongside the leader of the operation. "They are now in police detention. Police are doing their investigation. "They open two separate investigations for the matter.

One is for the operation they went for; whether the operation was authorised or not was being investigated, and the other is the investigation into the actual killing. When I went there some time ago they even brought them out. That is the stage we are now," Okpara said.

The family of the deceased is concluding plans to apply for autopsy to be carried out after which the body could be released for burial while police investigation continues. A source confided in this reporter that the police would conclude investigation next week and submit a report so that the officers can go for guardroom trial. "After the trial, if found guilty, they might be dismissed and then handed over for prosecution," the source said.

Okpara said he was convinced that the family of the deceased would get justice, saying: "They are doing what they are supposed to do. If the family likes they can now sue the police because the officer did not come on his own, he did not commit the offence as a person, he committed the offence as a police officer.

The police cannot run away from the liability." The lawyer said he and others would continue to follow up with the case, noting however, that the police would not want to "mess up" because the case is a straightforward matter. "It is not as if they were looking for who shot the deceased.

The officer never denied that he shot the man and the purpose of the autopsy is if the matter is going to court. He shot the man, who was not fighting him; He was not an

armed robber either. He came in when they wanted to arrest the young man and pleaded with them.

That was the only offence he committed,” Okpara explained. Solomon’s case however, is not an isolated one. There are several others in the past. For instance, Open Society Justice Initiative in a report alleged that the police in Nigeria commit extrajudicial killings, torture, rape, and extortion with relative impunity.

In the report, Criminal Force: Torture, Abuse, and Extrajudicial Killings by the Nigeria Police Force, the civil society group noted that police personnel routinely carry out summary executions of persons accused or suspected of crime, rely on torture as a principal means of investigation, commit rape of both sexes, with a particular focus on sex workers, and engage in extortion at nearly every opportunity. The group said: “In the recent past, government acknowledged these problems and promised to address them.

But, like everything Nigeria, nothing has been done to date while abuses have continued with no accountability. We implore both the country’s political leadership and the police authorities to pay serious attention to police reforms in order to restore the needed confidence in public safety.”

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