

# How Awkuzu SARS murdered my three sons in three years –Mother

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NNEWI

**M**rs Ukamaka Obasi, a native of Oruoke, Ezze, in Ebonyi State, has recounted how the operatives of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, SARS, in Awkuzu, Anambra State, rendered her childless, after allegedly killing her three sons extra-judicially, between 2012 and 2014.

According to her: "On one fateful day in July, 2012, I came back to our residence at Umenweke Street, Okpoko in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State, and was greeted with the news that my first son, Ebuka, was picked up by SARS operatives at his shop at Sokoto Road, Fegge, Onitsha, where he was selling clothes; based on the allegation that he was a member of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB).

"It was already very late so I couldn't go that night. So, the next morning, his father, Thomas Obasi, and I went to SARS headquarters at Awkuzu, where they confirmed to us that he was in their custody. They told us to continue bringing food for him until they finished their investigations, so that we would take him on bail.

"We continued visiting him; bringing him some food items at each occasion. We did this for about one week. Each time I visited him, I would be made to pay N2000 at the counter before I would be allowed to give him food.

"However, on one of those days, when I brought food for him, one of the female officers there told me to stop bringing food for him, that he had been executed.

"We (his father and I) wept uncontrollably before we left SARS office. We made several efforts to confront the authorities of the anti-robbery unit to tell us the offence our son committed that led to his execution; but our efforts yielded no fruits. "Sadly till now we are still yet see his dead body. Honestly, it was very difficult then to convince people in our village that our son, who was 20 years old as at then, and was planning his traditional marriage in three months time, was arrested and killed by SARS, based on the allegation that he was a member of MASSOB.

"As if they were not done, it happened again that in August, 2013, about one year after the murder of our first son by SARS operatives in Awkuzu, our second son, Chibuike, was also arrested by the same SARS. He had taken over his brother's shop after his demise.

"So, it happened that on that fateful day, when he was returning from market, SARS operatives, who were on routine patrol, arrested him at Fegge area of Onitsha, and took him to their Awkuzu headquarters. We learnt that a good number of boys returning from that market that evening were also arrested.

"Again, I and my husband went to SARS headquarters. They confirmed to us that his name was among those arrested for allegedly belonging to MASSOB.

"They told us to bring him food so that he would not starve. We kept talking food to him for about two weeks. Each time we went there, we would be tasked to bring money at the entrance gate, and also at the counter, before my son would be given the food. I had to pay dearly for the two weeks I took food to him at SARS.

"Finally after two weeks I was told by one of the officers to stop coming. He told me that they confirmed that my son was a MASSOB member, and that he had been killed!

"It happened that my husband accompanied me that very day. When the information was broken to us - my husband collapsed.

"Doctors at the popular Ndeli Hospital at Awkuzu, fought tirelessly before they could



revive him. From that very day, my husband started developing different health problems; but that is a story for another day.

"Then again in October, 2014, my husband and I were alerted that our last son, Chibuike, who was about 18 years old then, was arrested by SARS operatives attached to Okpoko Police Station.

"The information was that Chibuike was riding on a motorcycle with one of his friends, and that they were going to buy condemned iron materials, popularly called scraps, when they were overtaken by SARS operatives at the Upper-Iwaka area of Onitsha, and was taken to the police station.

"When we got to the station, we were told to come the next day; but when we got there the next day, the SARS commander at Okpoko told us that he had been transferred to their headquarters at Awkuzu.

"We then went to Awkuzu, SARS operatives there confirmed that he was one those in their cell. My husband was permitted to see him and speak with him before we left that day.

"So, I kept bringing food for him for a period of three weeks. On one of those days, one of the officers, a woman, told me to stop spending my money and time coming to the station. The officer was positioned at the entrance gate; so, when I was talking with my husband, she overheard us. That was how we got to know that she was from our area in Ebonyi State.

"She told us frankly that our son died about four days after he was brought to SARS office, and that officers in charge of the cell were the people eating the food I was bringing for my son. She told us that our son was accused of being an armed robber, who had been in the wanted list of SARS.

"We insisted that we must enter SARS office, because, we were not convinced about the information. When we got to the counter, the cell officer came to take the food, but we told him that we must see Chibuike and speak with him.

"It was in the ensuing argument that we came to realize that our son was no more in their cell. When I and my husband begged them to show us the bodies of our children, nobody spoke to us; rather, we were pushed out of the station, after the officers had called us all sorts of names, including 'corrupt parents,' 'parents of criminals,' and so on.

"It was based on these developments that

my husband left me. He went back to Ebonyi State some years back, and refused to come back to Onitsha till date. I am alone here managing my."

Speaking further she said: "During those years of persecution, we spent a lot of money. Friends and family members contributed money to assist us. We also borrowed a lot of money trying to secure their bail. We spent over N900,000 in the hands of SARS; because, each time, they would ask us to bring, say, N150,000 or N200,000; promising that they would release the person; at the end, they would kill the person.

"That situation, coupled with indebtedness, forced my husband to leave Anambra State; because, he could not pay what we borrowed and creditors were disturbing us."

A human rights activist, Comrade Nweke Nweke, who is the Coordinator of the Oppressed Voice International (OVI), who also spoke with SundayTelegraph, said that the story of Mrs Ukamaka Obasi and her family was a sympathetic one.

According to him: "This kind of development was part of treasons I fell out with Awkuzu SARS. When the first son of Mrs Obasi was arrested in 2012, the family consulted me as an activist. I insisted that SARS must tell us what the boy did that warranted his arrest and detention; but the only offence they told me the boy committed was that he was one of the MASSOB members they were looking for.

"I challenged SARS that the boy in question was not arrested with any arms, and that nothing incriminating was found in him; that they should either take him to court or release him on bail. But the then SARS commander, James Nwafor, who, incidentally, comes from the same village with me, threatened that if I dared him further, he would rope me into the boy's crime.

"In order to make SARS release that boy, I took to the social media to publish the boy's ordeal in the hands of Awkuzu SARS; yet, SARS did not hearken to our cries. "They went ahead to murder the 20-year-old boy extra-judicially inside SARS office at Awkuzu.

"In 2013, the same woman had the same problem, when her second son was arrested. These boys in question were doing well in their businesses. They were the hopes of the family. Because of their family background, they couldn't go further in education. The

first son finished secondary school, and set up a business. "He took the second son, who managed to finish primary six, and they were hustling to assist their parents; because, their mother was hawking petty items, while their father, Thomas, was a vulcanizer.

"When the second son was arrested in 2013, we mounted the same pressure. Before we could know what was happening, SARS officers told us that the boy fell sick in the cell and died. We requested for the corpse, but they could not provide it.

"Again, in 2014, the last one was picked by SARS. The family also beckoned on me for assistance. He was arrested and taken to Okpoko SARS in Ogbaru LGA. As at then, the SARS commander in Okpoko station was one Mr. Anthony from Edo State, now retired. We approached him, discussed with him, and he told us to come the following day. When we went back the following day, he told us he was transferred to Awkuzu.

"His parents went to Awkuzu the following day; but I had to delay my going there. About three or four days later, I decided to go to SARS office myself to discuss conditions for his bail.

"Unfortunately, immediately I got to the premises of Awkuzu SARS, I saw two SARS officers upstairs, while the boy in question was downstairs, naked. They hung a long rope on his neck, and were dragging him up as if they were fetching water from a well. And before they could release him, the boy forcefully passed stool and died. "The third son of Mrs Obasi, my client, was strangled to death in my very presence. When I got home that day, I could not control my emotions; but as a man, I only told Mr and Mrs Obasi that SARS said we should come back later."

He narrated further, "People always tell me that I antagonized SARS. Yes, I did, because, I witnessed some of their extra-judicial killings in Awkuzu. The time of James Nwafor and the time of Mr. Abang as SARS commanders in Awkuzu were the periods Awkuzu SARS was turned into an abattoir.

"When James Nwafor was at Nnewi as unit commander of SARS at the industrial city, he was also known for extra-judicial killings. Anybody in Nnewi will tell you this. I followed the activities of James Nwafor right from his days in Nnewi to his days in Awkuzu, before he retired.

"I cried constantly to the relevant authorities that Nwafor should be removed as SARS commander, that he was only there to kill; but nobody listened to me. People said I was saying so because I wanted to blackmail him. The blood of innocent citizens murdered in Awkuzu SARS was responsible for the recent uprisings in different parts of Nigeria, in the form of #EndSARS. The innocent blood shed by SARS sparked the protests. The youths demonstrating all over Nigeria was actually mourning their colleagues, whose innocent blood was shed in Awkuzu SARS.

"In any civilized society, a crime suspect is assumed innocent until he is proven otherwise by a court of competent jurisdiction. It was not so in SARS. It is an open secret that in the defunct Awkuzu SARS, youths were killed extra-judicially, and their kidneys and other relevant body parts were sold to rich men.

"The government must ensure that such things never happen again in the country. Government should see to it that recent uprisings in the country as a result of police brutality are a thing of the past. There are people, who were core members of police during James Nwafor's reign of terror, who should be invited for questioning, because, they were never supervised by the SARS, or, probably, they were involved in the proceeds of corruption in SARS. If urgent steps are not taken, what happened in SARS will continue to happen in any other unit of the Nigeria Police Force."