

Crime

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ABA

Missing phone: Bakassi Boys tortured my son to death –Dad

Mr. Chimezie Matthew broke down and wept as he narrated how members of the Abia State Vigilante Group aka Bakassi Boys, allegedly tortured his 18-year-old first son, Precious Matthew, causing him to "vomit his brains" before he died.

Chimezie urged the Abia State government, human rights society in Aba and the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) to help him get justice for the murder of his son.

Chimezie said Precious would have been 19 years old on June 2, 2021. The boy was preparing to sit for the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB)-conducted Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UMTE) hoping to gain admission into the university, when his life was cut short. The grieving father explained that the Bakassi Boys arrested Precious on April 13, 2021 and he died the following day.

Recalling Precious's last moments Chimezie said: "I went to the police area command to make a formal report on the matter. Two policemen were asked to follow me to the hospital where Precious was on admission. By the time the policemen got to the hospital, Precious' brain was gushing out of his mouth. The police made a report of attempted murder. After a while, Precious died. I had to call the policemen to tell them Precious was dead."

Insisting that his son was tortured to death by four men who were well known members of Abia State Vigilante Group in the community, Chimezie added that he had been threatened because he demanded justice for his son.

He said: "My son was killed by vigilante group Commander, Mr. David Nzeribe, Mr. Isaac Njoku aka Isiguzoro, who is the second in command to Nzeribe, Mr. Obinna and Mr. Daniel aka Fear Woman. These four men killed my son. I want them to face the wrath of the law."

"The worst part right now is that the same men, who killed my son, are now threatening to deal with me if I don't stop asking for justice. They even went as far as gathering some chiefs from the community to come to my house to plead with me to forget about the death of my son, that they would help me to bury my son. They were over 11 in number with one doctor, telling me that what has happened has happened. In fact, what they came to do in my house was to threaten me. They told me that this place was Ngwa and since I'm not an indigenous person of that community, I should just accept the death of my son and move on. They told me that it was a better option for me."

"I was in the village when my wife called; saying Precious went to the office of Bakassi Boys at Umungbe, Asa-Amato community, Osisioma Local Government Area, after a boy accused him of stealing a phone. When he was asked what led to such an accusation, he replied that it happened at a friend's father's wake. According to him, they were four that went for the wake, including the boy, Izuchukwu alias Aka Baby. It was Izuchukwu who said that his phone was missing. It was in the morning Izuchukwu complained that his phone was missing and everyone was searched, but the phone was not found on anyone. Later,



Chimezie



Precious

Izuchukwu found his way to my house, and asked my son to escort him to a place to see a friend. Unknown to Precious, this Izuchukwu was luring him to the home of a native doctor."

Precious would later tell his father that the place Izuchukwu took him to, didn't look like a native doctor's house. However, it was when the native doctor came in with red clothes to cover him that he discovered that he had been tricked into the lair of a native doctor.

Chimezie said: "Precious pushed the native doctor and ran away, while his workers tried to stop him. Precious took the motorcycle he came with and ran. He ran into members of the Abia State Vigilante Group and narrated what happened."

Chimezie recalled that while Precious was narrating his ordeal to the Bakassi Boys, Izuchukwu and the other boys, who were at the native doctor's shrine, caught up with them. Precious quickly fingered them to the Bakassi Boys. Precious, Izuchukwu and others went to the Bakassi Boys' office.

The Bakassi Boys asked Izuchukwu to give them N7,000 so they could find out the person who stole the phone. Izuchukwu allegedly responded that he didn't have money, pleading that they should allow him to go home, that he would get the money. Izuchukwu and the other boys left, leaving only Precious with the Bakassi Boys.

Chimezie said: "This was happening about 1pm. My son was kept there until past 6pm. When it was 6pm, they asked him to go home and return the following day. He returned the next day, but Izuchukwu didn't show up. When it was 5pm, they asked him to go home. The third day, which was Saturday, he didn't go because that was the day he usually goes for church programmes. He was a drummer and always goes to church to drum. After a while, Bakassi Boys called my wife, to whom my son submitted her number as well as that of my in-law, who has a church at Uratta, Pastor Esther Amaechi, in case he was needed."

The father added that his wife informed the vigilantes that Precious had gone to church. When Precious returned home the following day, his mother told him that the men called. He dashed off to their office to know why they were calling.

"He asked another of his friends, Onyebuchi Chibueze, to go with him to the place. Onyebuchi was also at that fateful wake. Onyebuchi told us that immediately after they got there, the leader of the vigilantes asked Precious to enter their cell.

"The Bakassi men started maltreating my son because Izuchukwu had already given them the N7,000 they requested for. Precious resisted entering the cell, but the Bakassi Commander at Asa-Amato, Mr. David Nzeribe, asked his men to force him. My son pleaded with them to call his parents, but they refused. I wasn't around when this was happening, but I was already on my way home and I later heard that they called my wife, but her phone didn't go through," Chimezie said.

Chibueze, who accompanied Precious to the Bakassi Boys' office, explained that after the Bakassi Boys called Precious's mum and couldn't get her on the phone, they called her sister, Pastor Esther Amaechi, who said she was in Port Harcourt, attending a programme. She promised to go to their office later.

He said: "When the pastor did not show up, Precious asked the Bakassi Boys to let him go, that he had not done anything wrong. They got annoyed, saying he was proving stubborn. They began to beat him. I pleaded with them to let him go, but they threatened to deal with me as well. They later put the two of us in the cell after beating Precious mercilessly. They tortured him, and then left us there until past 6pm. We didn't see their commander, and I started shouting, telling them something was wrong. But they didn't listen. It was when their leader came back and noticed that Precious was almost dead, that they forced me to take him back to his parents. They

arranged for a motorcycle to take him home, but he was in a life-threatening condition."

Chimezie recollected that when Precious was brought home, he was almost dead and had defecated all over his body.

He said: "I went into the village to alert the Prime Minister of what happened. We went to Bakassi office and the only person I saw there, Bekes, said he didn't know what happened, that he only came for night duty. The Prime Minister asked me to take Precious to hospital, which I did. We rushed him to a hospital at Paulks Road and he was placed on oxygen. We were later asked to move him to another hospital. Ambulance from the hospital came to pick him up, but after an hour and thirty minutes there, Precious died. Before then, I had reported it to the police."

Asa-Amato community has three traditional rulers as it is divided into three autonomous communities of Ugwunamabakala Ancient Kingdom, Asa Umudioka and Asa-Amato. The traditional ruler, His Royal Highness (HRH) Eze Gabriel Ubani, of Asa-Amato, said he heard of Precious's death by some members of the Bakassi Boy on May 25.

He said he then obtained the phone number of the commander of the vigilante group, called him to verify the information but his phone line didn't go through.

However, HRH Eze Ifeanyi Nworu of Ugwunamabakala, another traditional ruler in the area, said he didn't know anything about the matter.

The General Commander of Abia State Vigilante Group, Mr. Martins Idika, said that no one was killed by his men at Umungbe, Asa-Amato in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State.

The state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), SP Geoffrey Ogbonna, said the police received the complaint.

Ogbonna said the State Criminal Investigations and Intelligence Department (SCIID), Umuahia, was investigating the murder.

He said efforts by police to reach the Commander of Bakassi Vigilante, Idika, several times, had failed and text messages sent to him were not responded to.

The human rights community in Aba has asked a human rights lawyer, Chief Emperor Ogbonna, to take up the matter and ensure that justice is done and all the suspects arrested and tried.

He said: "It is regrettable that the vigilante commander has not appeared to make any comment to the police after his men allegedly killed Precious. The police said they've sent letters to them, but the vigilante commander has not replied or shown presence."

"Last week, I wrote a letter to the vigilante group commander, giving him five days to produce the alleged killers to enable the law to look into the matter. However, they've refused to do anything as if the person that died isn't a human being. After I've written to them, and he has refused, that will never truncate justice. The law must be respected. The boy they allegedly killed was a Nigerian citizen and must not die in vain."

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