

# Crime

## Land: Panic as gunshots, blood, death rock Lagos community

Precious Yusuf

**G**berigbe is a community located in Ikorodu area of Lagos State. For a long time now, crisis has rocked the town with two families fighting over who is the rightful owner of the lands and this has led to the death of nine persons.

The two families are laying claim to the land and over the years, the matter has been dragged to the court. Both parties claim to be the rightful owner of the lands and in the cause of trying to settle the matter through force, nine innocent lives have been lost.

In Gberigbe community, since May 2021, a series of catastrophes have befallen the community members due to the land dispute, which has now lasted for over a hundred years.

The land in dispute is said to be about 2000 hectares and part of it had been earmarked for different projects. At least 200 acres have been given to the government for agricultural purpose.

During the battle for the lands, besides lives that have been lost, properties, and means of livelihood have also been destroyed, yet the crisis lingers.

One family claim to have lost at least six extended family members naming such persons so lost as: Rodosho, Osugbawo, Oludero, Shokelu, Fasanya and Fowora, while the opposing family also claim to have lost of their members including: Mayan Oludera/Ladera.

Following the recent events in the community, the families are seeking justice for all the wrongs that have been done to them since the fight for the land intensified.

The Regent of Gberigbe, Korede Oludero, said that part of the land, which was in dispute had been ceded to the Mayan family which included the Ladera and Odusanya families, who he claimed were just customary tenants on the land.

He explained that in the past, the head of the Mayan family used to be a traditional medicine man, who helped to treat a member of the Erelu of Gberigbe Orelade land. After successfully treating the man, the family decided to show appreciation by giving him some plots of land to farm.

"When Mayan helped our ancestors, they decided to show appreciation and also built him a house close to where we keep all our royal artifacts and crowns. This was done with the hope that since he was a medicine man, he would be able to protect the items in times of war and other conflicts," Oludero explained.

According to Oludero, they all lived in the community peacefully till conflict broke out over the ownership of the lands.

Due to this conflict, the matter was taken to the court for settlement in 1911. Judgement was passed in 1913 by Justice Jake Yinkfield; he ruled against the Mayan family which were the plaintiffs. He ruled in favour of the defendants and asked them to pay some taxes.

In 2000, the Mayan family took the case to the high court again and about nine years later, Mrs. Oke Lawal, the judge, passed judgement in their favour. This led to another court battle between them, as the Erelu fam-



Late Lateef Tijani

ily took the case to the Appeal Court in 2014, and the judge, Joseph Shagbaor Ikeygh nullified the rulings of the lower court.

After the court rulings, the warring families continued to live in relative peace until May 19, 2021, when all hell broke loose.

Kasim Rodosho, a member of the family, recounted the events that occurred on that day and how it changed his life. Kasim, a businessman, said that he got home on that fateful day in the afternoon and met a lot of thugs and Mobile Police (MOPOL) in the environment.

He alleged that these people were land grabbers, who had come to collect the land forcefully for the Mayan family and in the process seven innocent people were killed and their bodies are still in the mortuary yet to be buried and several others sustained varying degrees of injuries.

He said: "When I got home and saw many thugs and MOPOLs with guns I was scared. In the course of trying to escape from the pandemonium, I was shot in the leg. They tried to carry me away, but I was saved by some of my family members and then rushed to the hospital. That is where I have been since May. I was only recently discharged."

He further stated that his younger brother, Fatai Rodosho, was killed during the shooting that ensued. A tenant, Mathew was also shot in the neck, said Kasim. He revealed that the tenant was still receiving treatment at an undisclosed hospital in Ikeja.

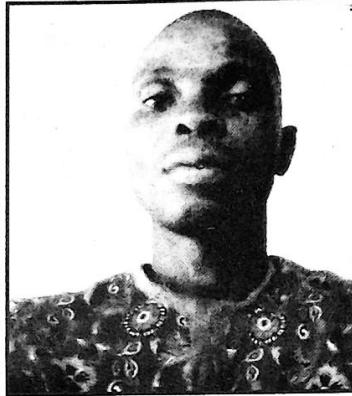
"The case was then reported to Area N at Ijeda Police Command, my statement was taken. Policemen from the Homicide Department came and arrested some of the thugs, but they were granted bail after they lied of not knowing anything about it," Kasim said.

Kasim said that in the course of investigation, he was flown to Abuja to give his statement on the case. The case was further reported at the Imota Police Station, which is the closest police station to the community.

He also claimed that the lands were being sold by these land grabbers who are not in any way related to the family.

Kehinde Osugbawo, another member of the family also talked about the various steps taken by the family in its attempt to get justice, and to reach a peaceful resolution.

He explained that they were sent out



Late Mutiu Taiwo

of the community and their houses burnt down. He also said that they were not able to take anything out.

Osugbawo said: "After the shooting on May 19, we reported the case to the Police X-Squad Section and the police came to investigate. The land grabbers told the police that they were securing the land for someone named Miyaki. The lands are along the Gberigbe-Igbekuta road, and when the police asked them to show the land, they wrongly took them to a land that had been given to Lagos State Government for an agricultural project. Two of the Mobile Policemen that were guarding the land for the land grabbers were taken to Abuja while the rest ran away."

After that, they went to the court and got a bailiff in order to place the verdict which declared them as the owners of the land.

"Before, we went to Imota Police Station to tell the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) in charge of the division, and to request escorts from him. The DPO said that he was already aware that we were coming. I was surprised because I had not called him to tell him about it. He gave us two patrol vans filled with Mobile Policemen to follow us to the community around 7am. By 10: am, they said they were on night duty and left only for one patrol van to return with four policemen and two guns. About 15 minutes later, the land grabbers came with their thugs and killed about nine people. We still haven't seen their corpses till today," Osugbawo narrated.

He also complained that it took operatives of the Rapid Response Squad (RRS) to get to the scene and then only succeeded in arresting two people. He alleged that following the arrest of the two suspect, one Aremu called the DPO and within minutes, the suspects had been released.

Osugbawo added that the DPO led a team back to the community, but they first stopped at the land grabbers' base to talk to them, and then they moved into the community and started arresting innocent people. He said that some members of the family were arrested and treated as suspects, while the two suspects were then treated as complainants.

Osugbawo recounted: "After I had written my statement, the IPO on duty asked me to tear it because it was implicating. He asked me to fill a new one. I didn't have any other choice than to fill a new one. We were then taken to D4 Ho-

micide Department at the State Criminal Intelligence and Investigations Department (SCIID).

"I was released along with the two suspects about 6PM. The other innocent people spent about 23 days in police custody before they were released. When it looked like we were not getting anywhere with the homicide detectives, we went to the IGP Monitoring Unit, and issued another statement, and they invited the land grabbers to Abuja, but they didn't honour the invitation.

"A family friend who had connections with the army sent eight soldiers to help us, and they arrested seven suspects and handed them to the Imota Police Station, but they were released even after we gave the DPO some financial support to help with the logistics of taking the suspects to Abuja. We also went to the General Investigation Department in Abuja and the Intelligence Response Unit (IRT), but still we have not got justice," he lamented.

Kazeem Omotosho, a human right activist, who represented the Mayan family, said that the other families was just fighting without facts or proof. He said that they had various documents which showed that the six families lied about who are the genuine owners of the land, and who were the tenants.

His words: "The cases that they have been winning in court is simply because their lawyer was able to find a loophole in the judgment passed by Mrs. Oke Lawal when the family was quoted as Antico, and they used that in their favour. They won based on technical issues."

Olayiwola Akanmu, a member of the Orelade/Ladera, Mayan family explained that over 10 judgments were passed on the land, and that there was no evidence that the contenders are descendants of Fasanya who was a customary tenant on the land and paid rent on the land.

Akanmu said: "On page 26 of the court proceedings, from the 1913 case, there is oral evidence from Talem Fasanya, their forefather, where he agreed that he used to pay rent on the land. It has been established unequivocally that they are not part of the royal family and the governor of Lagos State doesn't recognise them. Nobody is pursuing them away from the community or killing them, rather they are running because they are being investigated on the murder case of a Mobile Policeman."

He went on to add that when they won the case in the Appeal Court, they had sent away the Orelade family for seven years, until last year when they came back to reclaim their property.

He added: "You only lie to gain favour or because you are afraid. They have gone to various police departments, yet they cannot pin anything on us. Even their houses that they claim were burnt were when a power surge caused a fire in a gas plant and this happened at midnight. Many houses were affected, yet they claim we specifically burnt their houses down."

He also said that the Regent that they appointed was recognised legally in a document that was sent to Lagos State government on November 5, 2021 and he was even on a salary from the government.

Akanmu said that the police were working to ensure that all those involved in killings in the community are arrested and made to face justice.

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