

Newly-Wed Security Guard Allegedly Tortured To Death In Police Custody



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6 minute read



Njoku



IGP Kayode Egbetokun

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...body secretly dumped in morgue

A 23-year-old newlywed man, Japheth Njoku, has been tortured to death by the anti-kidnapping unit of the Imo State Police Command over being accused of stealing a pack of cigarettes.

The deceased who was a security guard at Alaba Market in Owerri, the state capital was initially detained over the allegation. The issue was however eventually resolved with the supposed complainant.

It was learnt that just as Njoku was about to be released, a fresh allegation was brought against him, and he was reportedly arrested again at the gate of the Area Command where he was initially detained by the police. This time, the new arrest was allegedly instigated by a trader at the market, one Obiagwu.

Genesis

The Executive Director, Rule of Law and Accountability Advocacy Centre (RULAAC), Mr. Okechukwu Nwanguma, alleged that, Njoku was later moved from Area Command to the Anti-kidnapping Unit of the State Police Command, codenamed 'Tiger Base' where he was allegedly killed and his body secretly taken to a morgue without his family's knowledge.

Nwanguma said Obiagwu told the police that she lost goods valued at N15 million over the past four years. This allegation, he however noted had never been previously reported to either the market authorities or the police.

The human right activist said she accused the late Njoku, who worked as a security guard, of being responsible for her missing items. "Njoku was not a criminal," Nwanguma emphasised.

"He was a victim of a corrupt police culture and a justice system that looks the other way." He said: "With the help of Obiagwu's police relative, one Inspector Barnabas the matter was transferred to the notorious anti-kidnapping unit, Tiger Base, a notorious torture facility masquerading as a police unit.

"During his month long detention, Njoku was subjected to relentless torture and extortion by the police which led to his death."

Forced confession

According to Nwanguma, Inspector Barnabas and his accomplices demanded a confession to a crime Njoku did not commit and pressed his family to pay millions of naira in extortion money.

"Even after reducing the 'ransom' to N4 million, they persisted with sadistic brutality." Died On May 6, 2025, Njoku reportedly died and his body was secretly deposited in the morgue at the Federal University Teaching Hospital, Owerri.

Nwanguma said the police continued to lie to his family, pretending he was still alive. "Njoku was murdered in Police custody. This was not an accident. It was a calculated killing, enabled by a corrupt police culture and a justice system that condones impunity.

"The recent allegations against Tiger Base are not an isolated incident, but part of a broader pattern of unconstitutional policing practices that have long subjected citizens to intimidation and abuse.

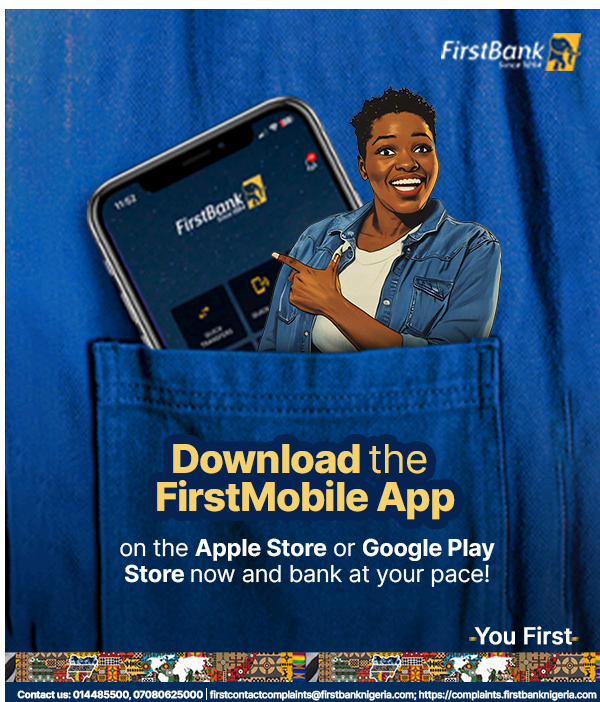
"The litany of human rights violations at Tiger Base includes arbitrary detention, forced confessions, denial of bail, torture, extortion, and now, cold-blooded murder. Tiger Base must fall: the murder of Njoku and Nigeria's Warped Security Apparatus".

Coroner's inquest

On June 5, the Imo State Magistrate Court, while ruling on a Motion on Notice marked Motion No: OW/MISC-425/2025, initiated a coroner's inquest into the death of Njoku.

According to the enrolled order, signed by the Director of Court Services, Mrs. Kechi Linus Eleazu, and dated June 11, 2025, the court directed that the autopsy must be conducted between June 16 and June 28, 2025.

The cost of the examination will be borne by the complainants. The purpose of the autopsy is to determine whether his death was unnatural. The order was issued on Wednesday during a coroner's inquest presided over by His Worship Chinaka U. Edith, Esq., in Suit No: OW/MISC-425/2025.



The inquest was filed by Mrs. Augusta Njoku, Mr. Uchechukwu Njoku, and Mr. Chibuzo Njoku, the deceased's wife and relatives as the 1st to 3rd applicants.

The respondents include Inspector Barnabas (Officer in Charge of the Anti-Kidnapping Unit), CSP Oladimeji, the Imo State Commissioner of Police, and the Attorney General of Imo State.

"The autopsy shall be supervised by the office of the DPP Imo State Ministry of Justice or any law officer so appointed by that officer who shall appoint one pathologist or medical director from the government hospital Owerri, for the autopsy, and shall fix a date for the autopsy and thereafter collect the result of the autopsy and report back to the court, at complainants' expenses. "The case was adjourned to 2nd July for the report of the autopsy.

Hotbed of abuse

Mr. Nwanguma said on January 13, 2023, RULAAC issued yet another public call to the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), to investigate the horrific and ongoing human rights violations by operatives of the Anti-Kidnapping Unit at Tiger Base, Owerri, Imo State.

The conduct of this unit mirrors everything that led to the disbandment of SARS in 2020, illegal arrests, incommunicado detention, torture, extortion, and the total disregard for due process.

He noted that in late December 2022, RULAAC received credible information regarding two young men unlawfully arrested by the Anti-Kidnapping Unit. Their alleged crime? None was stated.

These men were simply picked up from an ATM stand along Wetheral Road, Owerri, searched, found with nothing incriminating, and bundled into a police convoy that led them straight to Tiger Base.

"Upon arrival, they were held without charge, denied access to legal counsel or family, and their phones were seized. It wasn't until the following day that they were brought out to give statements only to be pressured into falsely confessing to being cultists.

"One of them, a fresh law graduate awaiting law school, explained he had simply gone to withdraw cash to pay the second young man, his electrician. For this, they were brutally tortured. Machetes were used to flog them on their backs.

They were told to confess to crimes they did not commit. Their rescue came by chance. One of the men recognised a former schoolmate now serving in the unit. He discreetly passed along his brother's number, which led to RULAAC's intervention.

"When we contacted the Officer-in-Charge, Supol Ola, he confirmed the arrest and claimed it was a mistake. But the horror didn't stop there.

The victims were eventually released, but only after being asked to pay N500,000 overhaul" Nwanguma said that to prevent such atrocities in the future, a complete overhaul of Nigeria's policing system, grounded in human rights, the rule of law, and accountability must be ensured.

"We need a system that prioritises the protection of human life and dignity," he said. Tiger Base is a crime scene, not a crime-fighting unit."

Police

When contacted, the Imo Police Public Relations Officer (PRO), DSP Henry Okoye, said, "I'm not aware of this report, but I will go to Anti-Kidnapping Unit to find out what happened and get back to you on the issue."