

## Anambra: Living in Fear of Extra-judicial Killings

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*Within a week, policemen attached to the Anambra State Police Command gunned down two youths, in unprovoked killings that are fuelling tension in the state. David-Chyddy Eleke reports*

Constitutionally, policemen are paid to protect the populace, but under the abnormal circumstances that are playing out in Anambra State, they are becoming the most feared killers and tormentors of innocent civilians. Cases abound of the police brutalising same people they swore to protect and sometimes, the police kill in cold blood.

Recently in Ukpok, Nnewi South Local Government Area of Anambra State, one Mr. Okechukwu Ifechigha, a welder who hails from the community, was shot on both legs by a police officer. Ifechigha was shot in his workshop about 8:30pm over an argument on why he should still be at his workplace at that time.

THISDAY learnt that the victim had a backlog of work to do and decided to spend more time at work to ease his work the following day, in order to satisfy some of his customers who were already waiting for the iron fabrications that were to be used in some building sites in the area. It was for this reason that Ifechigha stayed late at his shop working when he was accosted by policemen on patrol.

Sources said the security men tried to intimidate him by asking what he was still out doing at that time, when he reminded them that he was in his shop and would not yield to any form of the harassments and intimidation. They insisted that Ifechigha had no right to be out at such time in his workshop. In the process, an argument ensued between both parties, and one of the officers shot him first on one leg, and again on the second one, incapacitating him on the spot.

## **Repeat Performance**

Barely a week later, on August 7, another team of policemen struck at Agulu, Anaocha Local Government Area. In that incident, they killed one on the spot and injured another severely. This time however, the bone of contention was said to be bribe of N100, which the police officers at the checkpoint tried to extort from a commercial vehicle driver.

While the driver engaged the policemen in an argument, the deceased, one Nonso Onyeme, was minding his business inside the bus when the bullet hit and killed him on the spot. Onyeme had boarded the bus at Agulu enroute Awka to transact a quick business and dash back. He never made it back.

According to eyewitness reports, the driver of the commercial bus had refused to part with the N100 bribe the policeman requested for because his vehicle particulars were complete. His refusal was said to have aroused the anger of one of the policemen who in his rage cocked his rifle, and at close range shot Onyeme in the head. Because the gun was shot at close range, the bullet pierced through Onyeme's head, came out and hit another passenger who sat at the back, injuring him severely.

Upon sighting the angry mob approaching, the policemen were said to have shot sporadically into the air before escaping in their patrol car. Expectedly, these two killings within one week has drawn concern from members of the public.

## **House of Assembly Speaker Reacts**

Reacting to the killing of Ifechigha on July 30, the honourable Speaker of Anambra State House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. (Barr) Rita Madaugwu condemned the death. The speaker who represents Ifechigha in the state assembly wondered why policemen would attack a man who was at his office, doing his legitimate duties. She also wondered why the police would entirely cripple him by shooting him in both legs rather than shooting him in one leg, if at all he posed a challenge to them.

Madaugwu who joined youths of the area who staged a protest over the killing, in a statement she signed and made available to journalists in Awka, said that the welder was in his shop working and had no criminal tendencies to warrant any suspicion. She urged the people of Ukpokwu to remain calm and law abiding, noting that the police command in the state was expected to hasten action in addressing the ugly incident.

The speaker, wondered why more citizens were falling victim to policemen as she recounted the story of another lady, an indigene of Ukpokwu too, Miss Igwetu Linda Nkechi, a Corps member who was serving at Abuja and was shot dead by a police officer at the evening of her passing out. "My people have been suffering in the hands of police officers ranging from humiliations to capital punishment. How can a police officer shoot someone like that? If it was in one leg, people would have said, maybe it was a mistake, but, this one, he shot him on both feet. If not that the guy jumped up the officer would have killed him instantly. He is there in the hospital lying critically ill. He can't even move his legs.

"Let me use this opportunity to call on the state Commissioner of Police, Garba Umar to take necessary action. The officer involved should be punished severely for his reckless act to serve as deterrent to other police officers. As far as I am concerned, it was a clear reckless action by the officer and he must be punished accordingly by the state police command," the statement read.

## Public Outcry

Meanwhile, the killing of Onyeme at Agulu has also generated outcry from the public and members of the civil society groups. A rights group, Behind Bars Human Right Defenders (BBHRD), last Thursday besieged the Anambra State Police Command headquarters to press for justice for the victim. The group who marched through the streets of Awka in protest, also petitioned the state police commissioner to ensure justice for family of the deceased.

The protesters carried placards with varying inscriptions like 'human lives are worth more than N100', 'police stop the extortions', 'we demand justice for Nonso Onyeme', among others.

Mr. Harrison Gwamnichu, spokesman of the group, who read their petition to newsmen in Awka condemned the dastardly murder of Onyeme and attempted murder of one Chigozie Okoye, whom the bullet that pierced Onyeme's head had injured. The petition was entitled "A Case of Murder, Attempted Murder, Conduct Likely to Cause Breach of Peace by Emereghene Benaro and Nine Other Police Officers, Metro Police Patrol Awka."

The group said more painful was that the deceased, who was in his early 30s was an orphan and had a child of about a year old. Gwamnichu said, "We wish to register our displeasure and dismay with the dastardly murder of Nonso, a businessman from Odidiama Village, Agulu in Anaocha LGA, Anambra and attempted murder of Chigozie Okoye. The shooting took place at Agulu-Awka road, near WAEC at about 1pm by 10 policemen led by one Emereghene Benaro attached to Metro Police Patrol Awka, Anambra Police Command."

The protesters called on the commissioner of police to arrest and transparently prosecute the culprits. They also charged him to dismantle all illegal checkpoints in the state. Another request made was that the police should henceforth take responsibility of catering to the needs of the deceased's family, to reduce their trauma as a show of sincere remorse.

The petition also read thus: "We demand the closure of illegal checkpoints in Anambra. We also demand an end to extortion by men of the Nigerian Police. We say no more to further careless killing of Nigerians. It is worrisome that about 24 hours after the gruesome murder, officers are yet to be arrested and your command is yet to make any official statement, nor have they visited the family. We demand detailed investigation of this ugly incident and insist that the Police produce all the culprits involved, these reckless behaviors by officers can portray Nigeria as a lawless nation," it said.

## Police Command Reacts

In reaction to both cases, the spokesman of the state police command, SP Haruna Mohammed, denied claims that Onyeme's killer has not been arrested. He said the officers involved in both the Onyeme and Ifechigha have both been arrested, adding that investigation have also commenced.

A press release by the police read thus: "Following the unfortunate incidents of alleged shootings of one Efechigha Okechukwu on the leg at Ukpok on 30/7/2018 and the recent shooting of one Nonso Onyeme on the 7/8/2018 by the police patrol teams attached to the command, the Commissioner of Police, Anambra State Command, CP Garba Baba Umar, ordered for the immediate arrests and full scale investigations into the circumstances surrounding the incidents.

"The CP further assured the public that justice would not only be served on the matter but that all perpetrators will be brought to justice. The CP further commiserated with the families of the