

# STORIES THAT TOUCH THE HEART

## This activist was murdered in his home town for daring to make peace

Stories by Vincent Ujumadu, Umuahia

THE sleepy community of Ndielu-Ugwueke in Bende Local Government Area of Abia State has been in the news for all the negative reasons, following the murder recently of a human rights activist, Mr. Kennedy Opara while trying to bring peace to his troubled town.

Opara, who was based in Aba, was worried that for the past four years, his people have known no peace because of misunderstanding between the traditional ruler of the area, Eze Thomas Awucha and his subjects.

The allegations against the traditional ruler were that he was terrorising his people, allegedly misappropriating monies contributed for development projects and using hoodlums to silence his perceived enemies.

When Opara, a prominent son of the community heard of this ugly situation, he visited the community severally to find out the true position of things. *Saturday Vanguard* gathered that after a meeting with the monarch who briefed him thoroughly on the matter, the activist promised to get to the root of the conflict in order to be able to resolve it.

Both later agreed that everything possible would be done to bring back peace. Kennedy's first move was to organise a seminar for youths in the community in collaboration with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) during which he spoke against violence and frowned at youths allowing themselves to be used for trouble shooting.

Unfortunately for him, most of the youths who attended the seminar were the same people allegedly being fingered for being behind the crisis. For what they probably saw as openly daring them, Opara was dubbed an enemy of the Ndielu Kingdom.

So, as he was heading back to Aba after the seminar, some of the same youths who listened to him preaching for peace, stopped him at the community square and before any help could come his way, had been clubbed him to death.

Ever since this dastardly act, the town has known no peace, indeed. Whereas the police are all over the rural area in search of clues, the natives are threatening to go to any length to unmask the murderers.

For several days, the women in the community demonstrated against Opara's death. And although the police have stepped into the matter, Eze Awucha had since fled. Already, the Ndielu Ugwueke Peace Accord Committee (NUPAC) set up by the elders has decided that owing to certain allegations, Eze Awucha should relinquish his position as Eze of Ndielu.

The reason, the committee noted, is that his continued stay in office as the traditional ruler could arouse more violence. Other decisions taken following the death of Opara were that he should hand over all monies and docu-



●Late Kennedy Opara



●Eze Awucha: Fled

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ments in his custody and which belong to Ndielu within one month.

A woman leader in the community, Mrs. Ogboli Ukeje said the murder of Opara was a big blow to the community. She said: "Kennedy Opara was a peaceful person. He

was always in the forefront on issues that would help to bring peace and development. Before he met his untimely death, Kennedy was planning his wedding for which we were all preparing to attend.

"When it was announced that he was bringing some people from outside the community to address our people on the need to embrace peace, we were all happy.

But when they murdered him after the seminar, most people initially fled the village, before summoning up courage to return to mourn him. Although we usually mourn for four days in our community, Kennedy was mourned for seven days and everybody participated in a procession round the community."

Another community leader, Mr. Justice Okezie said he would have been the first victim of the murderers, but God saved his life. However, Okezie is now living in exile after the

same youths who murdered Opara destroyed his commercial school and looted his wife's store in the community.

According to him, his own offence was that he led the people to support the community's electricity project instead of a feeder road which another high-placed native preferred.

"For several years, we were pleading to government to provide electricity for us,"

Okezie told this reporter. "The opportunity came through the World Bank-assisted Abia State Community-based Project for Rural People (ABCPRP). This project involved the six autonomous communities in Ugwueke and during a plebiscite conducted by ABCPRP, I supported the people's wish to have electricity instead of feeder road.

"For that reason, the youths were sent to destroy everything I have. But the climax was the killing of Kennedy Opara."

## W-i-c-k-e-d w-o-r-l-d !

*Laments man whose son landed a bank job soon after graduation but got killed on duty in a bullion van*

UGONNA Egbuka, a 23-year-old Higher National Diploma (HND) graduate of Electrical Engineering from the Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri was envied by his mates as a very lucky person.

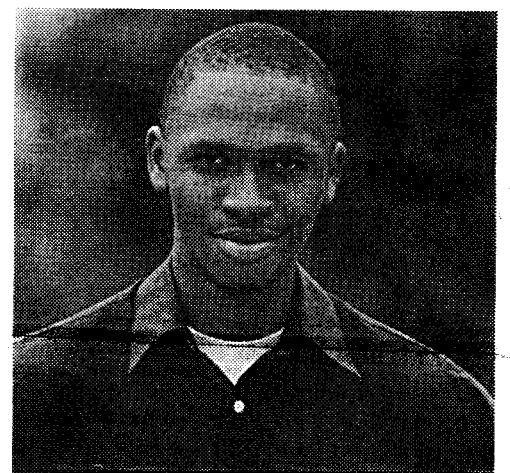
Soon after leaving school, he got a job at the Umuahia branch of one of the banks that opened its branch in the Abia State capital shortly after it was recapitalized. Some of his class mates who were still in the unemployment market were surprised that Ugonna already secured a job and in a bank for that matter.

But before he could settle down for a career in banking, tragedy struck when Ugonna was felled by the robbers' bullets while on official duty. And that, painfully, aborted all his plans for the future.

On that fateful day, Egbuka who was employed as a contract staff in January this year, had accompanied the bank's security personnel on currency transfer from Aba to Umuahia. As their convoy approached the Umuikaa junction on the Enugu-Port Harcourt expressway, a Toyota Land Cruiser jeep tried to block the bullion van which was in front. The policemen in the accompanying car fired in the air to scare the occupants of the jeep.

And rather than being scared, the shooting apparently angered the robbers who then fired back at the policemen, instantly killing one of them whom Ugonna was sitting beside. In the ensuing exchange of fire between the occupants of the jeep and the policemen in the accompanying car, the bullion van driver sped off from the scene and eventually made it successfully to the bank's branch in Umuahia.

But then, two lives including that of Ugonna had been lost. The police also killed the driver of the jeep. Eye witnesses told *Saturday Vanguard* that following the destruction of the jeep, the robbers snatched a Mercedes Benz V-Boot which arrived the scene at the material time and dumped their dead driver into the boot of the car. They also



●Late Ugonna Egbuka

*On learning that his son had secured a job at a bank, Dennis Egbuka had planned a thanksgiving service...However, this was not to be*

Although Pa Egbuka knows quite well that his son would not come back to him alive again, he is more piqued by the manner the bank handled his son's death. Speaking through a member of the family, Pa Egbuka said the bank had earlier pledged that it was going to pay some kind of compensation to his family and assist in the burial of