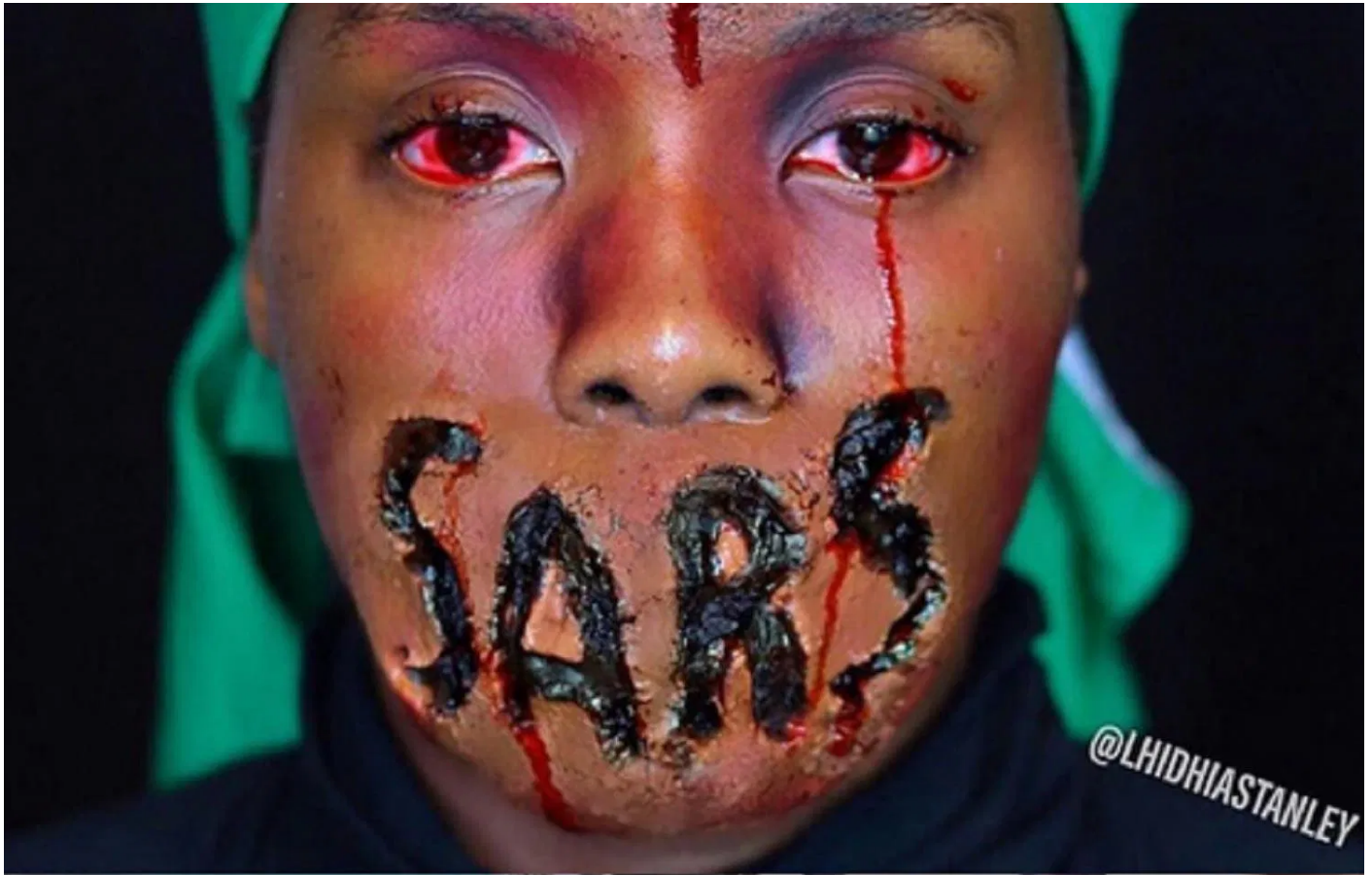


# How SARS operatives killed our mentally ill son, family tells Abuja panel

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drama as police witness threatens to attack NHRC's photographer

By Ikechukwu Nnochiri

The Independent Investigative Panel on Human Rights Violations by the defunct Special Anti- Robbery Squad, SARS, sitting in Abuja, resumed sitting in Abuja on Monday, with a family, narrating how their mentally ill son, Emmanuel Ita Ephraim, was extra-judicially killed in 2017 and branded an armed robber.

In a petition that was signed by brother to the deceased, Engr. Paul Offiong Ephraim, the family, told the 11-member panel headed by a

retired Justice of the Supreme Court, Suleiman Galadima, that their son was murdered around 9 pm on June 17, 2017, in Calabar.

According to the petitioner, the deceased who was 2006, diagnosed with mental illness at the Federal Psychiatric Hospital Calabar was returning to their house from church when he missed his way owing to his condition and entered into the wrong premises.

"We cannot explain how he missed his way due to his mental state and entered the wrong premises where he was found on top of the roof of a building at Abattim Street, Calabar.

"The men of SARS and Operation Skolombo located and shot him dead and dropped his corpse at Atakpa Police Station".

The family alleged that the Police, led by a Commissioner of Police, Mahammed Inuwa Hafiz, and a Superintendent of Police, Kabiru T. Salisu, who was the DPO of Atakpa Police Division at that time, initially attempted to exonerate the Nigeria Police Force from the incidence and also refused to name the officers that carried out the operation.

The petitioner told the panel that the Police subsequently claimed that the deceased was an armed robber and was killed in the exchange of gunfire, "which is totally false".

"Eyewitnesses at the place of the incident confirmed to us that our son and brother, Late Emmanuel Ita Ephraim was shot and taken away in the police truck alive.

"We were only Informed the next day in the morning that he was killed in an arm robbery incident with multiple gunshots on his lifeless body

"It is interesting to note that as at the time our son was shot dead, he was found with no arm or weapon, neither was he found attacking the SARS team. Now wonders why he was shot dead while he was armless.

"He had the right to life.

"Three years have passed by since our son and brother was extra-judicially killed and yet no justice.

"The family prays and have solace in the fact that the 11-man Independent Investigative panel (IIP) will not fail us.

"We pray the Independent Investigative Panel will investigate this matter thoroughly and bring the perpetrators of this evil act to justice".

Among annexures to the petition included a medical report of the deceased, a request for release of the corpse for burial, as well a photograph of the deceased lifeless body.

Meanwhile, the Justice Suleiman-led panel has ordered Police to produce evidence to prove that it deposited the body of the deceased which it claimed was brought to Atakpa Divisional Police station, Calabar, Cross River state by Officers of the Department State Service, DSS, and Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps, NSCDC, in the mortuary.

The panel also ordered the 2nd Respondent in the petition, Operation Skolombo Calabar, which the Police alleged were on patrol the time the deceased engaged them in exchange of gunfire with other armed robbers, to appear before it on December 15.

The orders were made after the DPO of the Atakpa police station where the corpse of the deceased was initially taken to, Salisu, who is now an Assistant Commissioner of Police, ACP, was questioned by the panel.

ACP Salisu told the panel that Police officers were not part of Operation Skolombo, the day the incident took place.

He said operation Skolombo which was set up by the Cross River State Government to assist in the maintenance of law and order in the state, consisted of Officers and Men of the DSS, NSCDC, Police, Military, and Navy.

Salisu told the panel that he only got involved in the case after the corpse of the deceased was brought to his station.

"I saw a lifeless body that was brought to the station and the Commissioner of Police asked me to take the body to the mortuary for autopsy.

"But I don't know if the autopsy was conducted. I don't know the dead person, I don't know whether the body was identified. I only instructed them to take it to the mortuary".

Asked if as the DPO, he made any attempt to investigate to find out who the dead body is, he said: "No, I did not".

Meanwhile, a mild drama played out in the course of the hearing, as ACP Salisu, threatened to attack and smash a camera belonging to a photographer from the National Human Rights Commission, NHRC.

"Don't take my picture. I will destroy that camera!", ACP Salisu bellowed as he moved to pounce on the photographer.

Similarly, ACP Salisu flared up when counseling to the panel, Mr. Chino Obiagwu, SAN, requested to know the time of his last promotion.

"This is not why I came here", he shouted at the senior lawyer.

Dissatisfied with his unruly conduct, the panel threatened to adjourn the matter and summon his superiors.

Addressing him, the Chairman of the panel, said: "You don't shout here. If you don't know the answer to the question, say I don't know".

On his threat to attack the photographer, Justice Suleiman said: "It is very unfortunate that a senior police officer is behaving this way.

"It is the Force that you are bringing to disrepute with this kind of conduct. And in case you are not aware, a member of this panel is also a serving Deputy Inspector General of Police. Some of these police lawyers you see here are Commissioners of Police who are your superiors.

"So you don't come here and behave anyhow! You can't touch the photographer that is doing his duty. It is the police force that you are representing here.

"In fact I think that you have to come back when the DIG is here. The DIG must be here and see this conduct", Justice Suleiman fumed.

Likewise, counsel to the panel, Mr. Obiagwu, SAN, supported the idea that the hearing be adjourned and the witness reported to his superiors.

"He has shown this aggression so many times. We apply for the matter to be adjourned so that he will be properly admonished by his superiors", Obiagwu added.

However, the Police lawyers led by Mr. Godwin Ijeoma, apologized on behalf of the witness and persuaded the panel to continue with the hearing of the petition.

Continuing his testimony, ACP Salisu said he was not aware of any coroner's inquest was conducted in respect of the deceased young man.

"I don't know if there was coroner's inquest. It was around 2 am that I got to the station and he was already dead by then. I did not even notice anything on the body. What I noticed was that it was a lifeless body.

"An entry was made when the lifeless body was brought to the station. If I go back I can check the records to get the entry.

"The entry contains names of the team of officers that brought in the dead body.

"I don't know the name of the team leader. He is of the DSS, but I don't know his name".

Asked if it would surprise him that there were gunshot wounds in the upper body of the deceased, the witness said: "No it will not surprise me".

He told the panel that he had earlier received a distress call through the walkie-talkie that there was an issue within the area the incident took place.

"I called my patrol unit on duty to go and check because they said there were armed robbers operating there.

"When they went there, they called me on the phone that nothing was happening there.

"But after some hours, I came back to the station and saw the lifeless body" he added.

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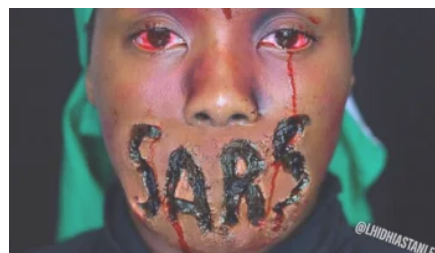


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