

Days after Okuama Community PG's death, 81-year-old Okugbaye dies in detention



...Only court can determine who's guilty, not military —Ogbodo
...Military acting as if there's no commander-in-chief —Muoboghare
...Ewu leaders write Tinubu over detained Okuama indigenes
By Akpokona Omafuaire & Ochuko Akuopha

UGHELLI—SIX days after the death of Okuama Community President General, in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, Pa James Oghoroko, in Nigerian military detention, 81-year-old Pa Dennis Okugbaye, the community's Treasurer, yesterday, died also in military detention.

The sad news of Pa Okugbaye's death, the second person of the six arrested Okuama leaders, has led to tension in Okuama Community.

The Okuama leaders were arrested in August 2024 and have been kept in military detention without trial.

The late Okugbaye was arrested alongside late Oghoroko, Prof. Arthur Ekpeko, Chief Belvis Adogbo, Mrs. Mabel Owhemu and Mr. Dennis Malaka between August 18 and 20, 2024 and has remained in military detention since.

Pastor Akpos Okugbaye broke the news of his father's death to Vanguard, yesterday, in tears.

Okuama Community, after the death of 72-year-old Oghoroko, had raised the alarm over the failing health of Pa Okugbaye, and demanded his immediate release.

Vanguard gathered that the Okugbaye family has sent about N401,000 between Monday and Tuesday for Okugbaye's health care through a source, who revealed his worrying status at the Nigerian Army headquarters, 6 Division, Bori Camp, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

The source, who showed electronic transfer receipts of the money sent, added that late Oghoroko also died in the same facility in Rivers State.

A secret military medical report of the late Okugbaye dated December 6, 2024, sighted by Vanguard signed on behalf of the Commandant had recommended his immediate release from custody owing to health issues and old age.

The medical report reference NAMC/GI/300/25 captioned ‘Medical Report of Mr. Denis Akporeyerebor Due To Medical Report. From Medical Centre Indicate that Mr. Denis Akporeyerebor Should Be Released From Detention on Health Issues.’ Reference: A. HQ NAMC/GI/300/32 dated 06 Dec, 24. B. AHQ Dpn/G3/300/25 dated 09 Dec 24, read, 1. In compliance with the provision for Reference. 1, The 6 Division Nigerian Army Commander vide Reference approved the release from detention of Mr. Denis Akporeyerebor. 2, The medical report show that Mr. Denis Akporeyerebor is above 80 years of age. 3, For your urgent attention and action.”

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Days after Okuama PG's death, 81-year-old treasurer dies in military detention

Death of PG: Okuama community protests, issues seven-day ultimatum for release of leaders

Omo-Agege calls for probe of death of Okuama community leader in Army custody

The report was dated December 6, 2024.

Unfortunately, he was not released from detention while he died yesterday and he became the second Okuama person to die in military detention within one week. Angry Okuama community people had on Sunday given the Nigerian Government and Nigerian Army, a seven-day ultimatum to release the detainees or they would resort to self help and block the River Niger to access.

At press time, the situation in the community is very tense, particularly at the community front with angry youths threatening immediate action.

Only court can determine who is guilty, not military —Ogbodo

Chairman of the Management Committee of the Internally Displaced Persons, IDP, Camp set up to resettle and rehabilitate displaced indigenes of Okuama-Ewu community by the Delta State government, Mr. Abraham Ogbodo, said he was just learning about the development.

He said: “I don’t know whether it has been confirmed.

“It is not a standard practice for people who are awaiting to have their day in court to run through the justice system, that they died in incarceration. It is not a standard practice, it is unfortunate.

“There should be real efforts at resolving all these issues and let people be arraigned in court, so that the court can hear everything and the ones that are culpable can be made to face the process and those that are without blame should be let go.

“For whatever reason, the military is not a law court. The military cannot decide who is guilty and who is not guilty, it is only the court and, no matter how long they keep people, in the end, it is the court that will have the final say.”

Military acting as if there is no commander-in-chief — Muoboghare

However, former Delta State Commissioner for Higher Education, Prof. Patrick Muoboghare deprecated the military over the development.

According to him, “Congratulations to the military that after killing the Okuama PG, they have killed the Treasurer. They are acting as if there is no Commander-in-Chief in the country.

“The Urhobo nation has no one to help them, so the military can kill all of them. The human rights community is not interested if Okuama is destroyed. Who knows the next person they will kill,” Muoboghare stated.

Ewu leaders write Tinubu over detained Okuama leaders

AS the world commemorates the Human Rights Day, Leaders of Ewu and Value

Rebirth and Empowerment Initiative has written an open letter to President Tinubu

Rebirth and Empowerment Initiative, has written an open letter to President Tinubu and the Nigerian Army to release detained leaders of Okuama community after over 114 days without charging them to court.

The letter read: “We believe this is a clear violation of their fundamental human rights as guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as Amended).”

Executive Director of the organisation, Pastor Edewor Egedegbe, who read the letter at a briefing, said: “The detention of these individuals is not only a violation of their human rights but also a breach of the principles of democracy and the rule of law.”

They expressed sadness over the death of the President-General of Okuama community, Mr James Oghorokor, who died in an undisclosed Army detention on December 4, 2024.

The letter added, “We demand that a thorough investigation be conducted into the circumstances surrounding his death.”

While noting that Sen. Ede Dafinone wrote to the Chief of Army Staff on October 9, 2024, calling for the release of the detainees or they be charged to court, the group said: “Unfortunately, the military has refused to comply with this request.”

They tasked President Tinubu to use his office to order the immediate and unconditional release of the Okuama indigenes being detained by the military.”

The Ewu leaders also said the President should order the military to handover the investigation of the murder of the 17 officers and men of the military to the Police.

“Remind the military that this is a democratic regime and their act of impunity will not be tolerated.

“Set up a special Commission of Inquiry to investigate and unravel the remote cause of the March 14, inferno, the subsequent reprisal, and the burning down of the Okuama community by the Army.

“Ensure that the Army operates within the confines of Section 217 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as Amended),” It added.

In the same vein, Director Public Relations, Ewu Clan Development Forum, Sir. John Ebireri, expressed concern over the continuous detention of the five leaders of Okuama community by the Nigerian Army despite persistent outcry and appeal to the Federal Government to intervene.

“We urged President Tinubu to treat with urgency, while expressing further alarm over a recent report of the death of Mr. Oghorokor, President General of Okuama community, one of the leaders of Okuama languishing in Army’s detention facility.

“As the death of Oghorokor puts us and the entire people of Ewu-Kinhdom in mourning mood, we are constrained to emphasise that no authority or security agency has legal justification to take anybody’s life save in execution of the sentence of a court order.

“In the eyes of law, our kinsmen who are being detained by the Nigerian Army are presumed innocent until proven otherwise by a court of law.”