



NETWORK ON POLICE REFORM IN NIGERIA

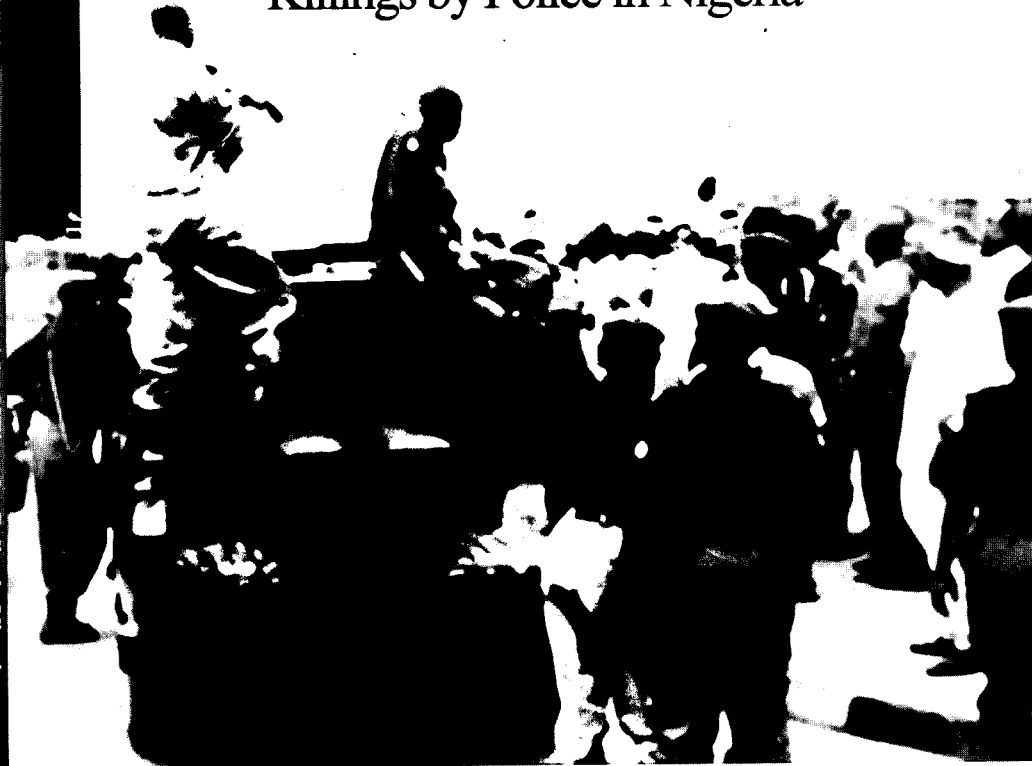


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Criminal Force?

Torture, Abuse, and Extrajudicial Killings by Police in Nigeria

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Police Post in Kano, narrated to NOPRIN researchers how he was saved from certain death by the timely intervention of a Police sergeant who called off his more enthusiastic colleague by noting that what the colleague was about to do to Abdullahi was "only reserved for robbers."¹⁵⁴ Innocent Daa' gba, a lawyer in private practice, described the standard practice to our researchers in an interview in Yola, Adamawa State, in March 2007.

Once an accused is arrested and is suspected to be a robber, instead of taking him to court, they would rather want to take him along the road. They take the suspect to the highway under the pretext that they are going to conduct further investigation, only to come back and report that in the course of moving on the highway the suspect attempted to run, so they had no choice but to take him down.

Field monitoring found that police personnel refer to detainees marked for execution as "rams" or "bush meat." In all states, the State Anti-Robbery Squads (SARS) and State Criminal Investigation Divisions (SCIDs) have acquired a reputation for extrajudicial executions. Certain locations are also well known to the public as sites for extrajudicial executions. The Police checkpoint at the Abuja Junction on the Abuja-Kaduna Road is one such spot remarkable for the perennial stench of decomposing human remains. Police sources in Anambra State pointed NOPRIN researchers to dump sites and graves for the remains of victims of mass Police killings in Awada near MCC and in Upper Iweka, both in Onitsha. They also mentioned other isolated dumping sites, such as the one at Agu Awka.

Following an execution, the Police would usually inform the families that the victims have been sent on an "errand," "escorted," or been "transferred to Abuja." For example, Dayo Anjorin, a student of the Osun State College of Technology, Esa-Oke, who lived in Ibadan with his family, left his home in Ibadan around January 31, 2007, to visit his school in connection with his post with the compulsory National Youth Service Corps programme. His family last saw him at the cells of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, SARS, in Oshogbo, Osun State, in southwestern Nigeria. About one week later when he was reported to be "in very bad condition with broken hands, legs and could not stand on his own, there were several wounds all over his body and blood was gushing

out of the right side of his abdomen and he could not speak."¹⁵⁵ The family never heard from or saw Dayo again. When they returned to ask for Dayo around February 15, they were told that "he had been taken to the Force Headquarters."¹⁵⁶

In another instance of Police deception, Ekeh Nwose's family located him in the cells of the Area F Police Station in Ikeja, Lagos State, two days after he left his home around March 15, 2005, to have a meal with a friend from school. The family was initially advised to pay a bribe of ₦11,000 for the privilege of visiting Eke in detention. After they paid the bribe, they were told that Ekeh had been transferred to the SCID in Panti, Lagos. In March 2006, after persistent inquiries, the Police informed them that Ekeh had been "transferred to Abuja." They never saw him again.

Corporal Amos Egbuchilam of the Nigerian Army was given a similar explanation about the disappearance of his brother, Precious Chiudo Egbuchilam, who was arrested sometime in June 2005. His insistence on seeing his brother only led to threats from the Police at the Lagos SCID in Yaba who told Cpl. Egbuchilam that his brother was an armed robber and that he must be "very stupid" to have asked about an armed robber. The Police threatened Cpl. Egbuchilam if he persisted with further inquiries. One Police officer reportedly asked him: "Is your brother not a criminal? Don't you know what we do with robbers here?"¹⁵⁷ In all of these cases, the Police never released the bodies to the families nor gave any account for what happened to the missing.

On 16 April 2007, in the heat of a general election, the Adavi Police Station near Okene in Kogi State, north-central Nigeria, was burnt in an incident in which the assailants also reportedly took away 21 rifles and "thousands of assorted ammunition"¹⁵⁸ and, according to one Police source, killed one Police Sergeant. At least ten other people were reportedly killed in this earlier incident.¹⁵⁹ The Kogi State Police Command believed that the attack was master-minded by a political gang active in Okene led by one Mohammed Awela. Following this incident, the Police in the State declared Mr. Awela wanted and branded him "an enemy of the State." On Sunday, 16 March 2008, the Police i