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Tension in Agbarho as 2 die in vigilante custody

Posted To The Web: Wednesday, January 20, 2010 - Emma Amaize & Akpokona Omafuaire



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AGBARHO — THERE was pandemonium at Agbarho community in Ughelli North local government area of Delta State, yesterday, when the corpses of two citizens allegedly seized by members of a vigilante team in the area a week earlier, were discovered with their kidneys, private organs and hearts missing.

The victims were identified as Isaac Ukanefimoni, 32, an indigene of Agbarho, and a native of Okpara Inland, Mr. Ovuoke Obie.

Four members of the vigilante team alleged to be involved in the suspected ritual killings have been arrested and detained by the police.

Vanguard gathered that the decomposing bodies of the victims, which were discovered at Onokpasa riverside, were deposited by angry villagers at the home of the President-General of the community, Chief Miller Orido, before they were later removed and deposited by the police at the mortuary.

There was fear of outbreak of mayhem as residents, who saw the remains of the deceased, vowed to retaliate. As a result, scores of residents have started fleeing the community.

Relations give account

Ejiro Ukanefimoni, a sister to one of the victims who also witnessed the January 13 'arrest' of his brother, told Vanguard yesterday at Agbarho that "on 13 January, at about 1.00am, men of a vigilante outfit (names withheld) came with their Hilux vehicle, broke into my brother's house and took him away, even while he kept shouting, 'Please, leave me alone.

What do you want from me?'. I came out and shouted also that they should please leave my brother, asking what he had done. They shot into the air to scare me and others away.

"As they were taking him away, I went and blocked the entrance, but they dragged him through the back of our compound into their vehicle. As they drove off, I called my elder brother (Hope) and narrated the incident to him. He sent the mobile number of one of the leaders who is now on the run. I called him and complained that his men had taken my brother. He requested that I call back in 15 minutes.

"After 15 minutes, I called back, he asked me to wait. After another 20 minutes, he flashed back and I called him, he said that it was not his boys who took my brother. I told him that it was his boys because the name was boldly written.

He asked where I was and I told him in my father's compound. He asked the question three times and then switched off his phone."

Mr. Hope Ukanefimoni took over from his sister, saying "the next morning, we swung into action, searching everywhere. We went to Agbarho police station and the police said he was not brought there. We went to the President-General, Chief Miller Orido, who promised to look into the matter."

Another villager, Mr. Solomon Ighobunor, recalled that on the night of the incident when he heard gunshots, he came out and saw one of the victims inside the vehicle of the vigilante group crying for help and shouting that he was innocent.

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Ukanefimoni continued: "We went to locate Ovuoke's mother, if she had a clue as to where they might have taken the victims. But she said she had no idea, so we went to where he (Ovuoke) is staying. The neighbours said he was arrested by the vigilante. We went back to the president-general who summoned one of the vigilante group members who denied knowledge of the matter, saying he was not on duty that night."

Royal father intervenes

"Orido, however, promised to get to the root of the matter. We left for the palace to report to the king, HRM Oghenerue-mu Arubi, Omamohwo II, the Osuivie of Agbarho, and he summoned the two leaders of the vigilante.

"To our surprise, only one of them showed up and told the king that it was the other leader's group that was on duty that night, because they worked from Monday to Wednesday and resumed on Thursday morning."

Investigations by Vanguard showed that the royal father was in the dark over the development. He said he would call a meeting of his chiefs, yesterday, to address the matter.

According to Ukanefimoni, "we went back to acquaint the president-general of the development. He promised to do his best to ensure that the boys were released anywhere they were being held.

"He called us on Monday to say that he had ordered that the vigilante boys be arrested and that four of those suspected to be involved have been detained at the police station for suspected kidnapping and attempted murder, with the police promising to arrest the runaway leader."

Search party finds corpses

It was learnt that on the advice of Orido, a search party was mounted. According to Ukanefimoni, "the other leader of the vigilante called me, saying he heard that the two men had been murdered and their corpses dumped near the Onokpasa riverside.

"Quickly, I called my brother to organise a search team. To our greatest surprise, we found the two corpses among many decaying bodies. We called the police who came with doctors to carry out post-mortem tests on them. Later, the president-general requested that we bring the corpses to the town."

Missing organs

"Having brought the corpses, the president-general directed that since post-mortem tests were being carried out and the corpses decomposing fast, we should go and bury them. We refused for two reasons: First, one of the victims is a stranger, not an indigene of Agbarho. Who will bury him without his family? Again, the two corpses were dissected with kidneys, private organs and hearts taken away. So we disagreed.

"We, nevertheless, took the corpses to the General Hospital in Agbarho. They refused to accept them in their morgue, so we decided to bring them to the president-general to order the hospital to accept them or we leave them at his gate. Right now, the hospital has agreed to accept them," he said.

The police at Agbarho refused to speak on the incident when contacted by Vanguard. The police spokesman in the state, Mr. Charles Muka, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, confirmed yesterday that the police were investigating the incident and that four persons were already in custody.

Orido told Vanguard: "I cannot come out now because the situation is tense. The youths have blocked my entrance, so I will talk later."

The women president-general, Chief Evelyn Ohwodjeheri, said she was not aware of the incident. Her words: "I travelled out of town and I am just hearing it from you. I will settle down and hear the full matter before I can talk."

Meanwhile, as the two corpses have been deposited at the Agbarho General Hospital Morgue, the unidentified corpses at the swamp are decomposing fast.

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