

THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA, 2005-2019

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Abstract

The Nigeria police is the organ of the executive arm of government whose responsibility is to maintain law and order, protect life and property of the citizens. This understanding of the statutory roles of the police as the defender of the rights of the citizens under the law underscores the cardinal, humane and mutual relationships that should better exist between the police and members of the society. However, from the evidence of human rights abuse by the police, ranging from brutality, extra-judicial killing and harassment to molestation and torture, shows that the Nigerian police has increasingly deviated from its constitutional role of maintaining law and order, and the protection of human rights to human rights abuse and violation. This work is an expose on the series of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Nigerian police against the innocent citizens of the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria whom they are meant to protect. This study employs the historical methodology to analyse the actions of the Nigerian police against the citizens. Data for this work was from both primary and secondary sources. We conclude by suggesting that the culprits of human rights violation among the officers and men of the Nigeria Police be made to face the full wrath of the law. The power of the 1999 Constitution and the Police Act which define the roles of the Nigeria Police and penalty for breaching the regulations should be invoked by the federal government for appropriate action.

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Introduction

The constitutional role of the police is to maintain law and order, protect the life and property of the citizens. The citizens, on the other hand, are constitutionally mandated to obey laws and regulations as enshrined in the constitution as well as respect constituted authorities which the Nigeria police force is part of. But from all indications and occurrences, it seems that the Nigeria police and the citizens are not on the same page when it comes to inter personal relations in the society. The police slogan which portrays the police as the friend of the citizens has been seriously questioned owing to the attitude of the police towards the supposed friend. Every now and then, incidences of human rights abuse – torture, harrasment and extra-judicial killings of the citizens by the police keeps popping up as if human right abuse is now part and parcel of their constitutional responsibility. This situation has made the citizens lose confidence in the Nigeria police as the defender of rights and protector of life and property of citizens. Thus, Nigerians are not only living in the shadows of torture, they are enslaved in a valley of death, where the police are the kill masters.

The citizens of southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria are known for their business prowess, entrepreneurial spirit and are experts and professionals in many walks of life. To this end, they engage in different kinds of businesses in order to contribute to the development of their communities. However, in this effort to make ends meet, tricycle drivers, bus drivers, mechanics, market traders and shopkeepers, including satchet water hawkers are accosted on a daily basis by armed police officers who demand bribes and commit human rights abuses against them, especially when they fail to do the bidding of the police officers. Those who fail to pay as demanded by the officers are most often threatened with arrest and physical harm. Often, these threats are visibly carried out immediately such as seizing their vehicles in the case of motorists or being shot outrightly. For instance in 2007, Izuchukwu Ayogu

and Nnaemeka Nwoke, who were students of Nsukka High School, in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state were arrested by the police for wandering. They were detained at the Nsukka police station and later found dead.

According to Alemika and Chukwuma, the primary function of the police is ‘policing’ which means securing compliance with existing laws and conformity with precepts of social order. In other words the main duty of the police is to maintain the peaceful coexistence of the citizens (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2003). But contrary to this noble roles of the police, the citizens are always afraid at the sight of the police even when they are going about their normal business, even children of below the age of ten cannot behold the sight of a police man on uniform. The reason for the fear by the citizens on sighting the police is that the police has criminalized every act that they thought will fetch them money. This they do against their professional ethics and constitutional responsibility.

In 2009, Amnesty International (AI) published an article entitled, *Killing at Will: Extra-judicial Executions and other Unlawful Killings by the Police in Nigeria*, which documented 39 cases of security force killing and enforced disappearances based on interviews and research conducted between July 2007 and July 2009. According to this report, “the national police conducted hundreds of extra-judicial executions, other unlawful killings and enforced disappearances each year. The police usually claim that the victims were armed robbers killed in an exchange of gun fire or that the suspects were trying to escape (Amnesty International, 2009). This issue of police extra-judicial killings and torture has continued unabated till today. From the above we can see that the police force increasingly indulged in human rights abuse; they used every available opportunity to exploit the citizens and abuse their rights. This paper examines the nexus between the Nigeria police force and human rights abuse in the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, 2005-2019.

The Police and Human Rights Abuse in Nigeria

The Nigeria police has had a great deal of human human rights violation since its inception in 1930. The police is empowered to safeguard the life and property of the citizens, maintain law and order, detect crime, apprehend offenders and prosecute same. But the police has created more problems for the citizenry and to this end, Aborishade (2017) contends that the Nigerian police force from its establishment in 1930 till date has been involved in unprofessional, corrupt and criminal conducts. Although some have conducted themselves in an exemplary manner, working in difficult and dangerous conditions and gaining reward that accrues to their professional conducts. For example, three police officers were on June 9, 2020 rewarded by the Anambra state government for their gallantry in foiling a robbery attempt in a commercial bank. Although, the Nigerian Police Force is assigned with law enforcement, but the methods often adopted by officers of the force have caused a great deal of denial of the fundamental human rights of citizens in most cases. There are instances where the police has acted unprofessionally in a bid to stop or dismiss protesters, or in trying to enforce the law generally. Their approach in carrying out this function has always resulted to human rights violation. In August 2003 in Ebonyi State, the police killed four members of the PDP in a check point. The victims included the chairman of Isielu Local Government; Onyebuchi Eze, Ifeanyi Nnaji, Ogbonna Odembaigwe and Uche Frank while on their way home (Oromareghake et al, 2018)

The foundation of the police from the colonial era has been faulty. They have been used on several occasions against the citizens as against their constitutional roles. According to Tamuno and Ahire, no sooner was the police force established and the rudiments of a judicial bureaucracy set in motion than the “Armed Hausa Police” were employed in a series of colonial government atrocities. In April 1865, for example, 118 constables along with 18 marines from HMS Investigator and HMS Handy attacked the Egba force that besieged Ikorodu, which the British considered a “friendly town.” (Tamuno, 1970, Ahire,1991). The police in

Nigeria have over the years betrayed their responsibility to protect Nigerian citizens and have instead preyed on them for personal gain. The relationship between citizens and the police is very often characterized by brutality, confrontation, exploitation and abuse. Research conducted in 2000 by the Centre for Law Enforcement and Education (CLEEN), a Lagos based NGO, observed that the use of violence by the police against citizens in Nigeria was widespread. Of 637 respondents to a survey carried out in fourteen states, 14.8 percent said they had been beaten by the police, 22.5 percent said police had threatened to shoot them in the past, and 73.2 percent said they had witnessed the police beating another person. A sample of 197 prison inmates, revealed higher figures of police abuse; 81 percent of respondents said they had been beaten or slapped and 39 percent burnt with hot objects (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2000). This is a complete deviation from their constitutional role because there is a wide difference between protection of citizens and abuse of citizens by the police force.

Although the Nigerian police has created different units to address the rising spate of crime in the country, these special units turn out to be special units that violate people's rights. These special units such as the Special Anti-robbery Squad (SARS), (Federal Anti-robbery Squad-FSARS), Operation Sweep, Rapid Response Squad and the Intelligent Response Team (IRT) now constitutes nightmare to the citizens who could no longer bear the unruly attitude of the police towards them. Immediately after his inauguration in 2002, former Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun established a federal anti-crime task force known as "Operation Fire-for-Fire". Balogun announced that there would be "a massive onslaught against armed robbery, assassinations, and other violent crimes (Vanguard, April 16, 2002). He instructed officers to "conduct aggressive stop and search operations by carrying the battles to bank robbers". This would involve raiding all known and suspected black spots, flash points and other criminal hideouts (This Day, April 17, 2002) This instruction gave the officers and men of the force excessive and arrogant power to harass innocent people in the name of stop and search, and arrest of

hoodlums in a manner that violates human rights. This illegal and unprofessional conduct of the Nigeria police has led to the loss of confidence in the police by the citizens. It is for these reasons that the relationships between the Nigeria police and citizens are largely characterized by suspicion, prejudice, mutual disrespect, conflict and violence (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). The deepening gap between the Nigerian people and the police which has resulted into crime reporting apathy might have taken its origin from this background. Thus, some people chose not to report a crime to the police because some who came to report a crime to the police were at one time or the other arrested by the police. But the police have forgotten that 'Trust' in the police is important because without public trust in the police, policing would be without consent and legitimacy, which is difficult or impossible (Goldsmith, 2005).

Case Studies of Human Rights Abuse by the Nigerian Police in the South-East of Nigeria

Ordinary Nigerians traveling on the country's roadways, buying or selling at markets, running daily errands, or working within their offices are routinely subjected to police harassment and torture. Those who resist and fail to pay bribes as demanded are often threatened and unlawfully detained, and at times physically and sexually assaulted, tortured, or even killed by the police. Many of these abuses are perpetrated as a means to further extort money from ordinary citizens. The police officers make little attempt to hide the collection of money, exposing the near total lack of political will on the part of Nigerian authorities to hold police officers accountable for their actions. The Nigeria police human rights abuse are often prevalent in many forms.

Police Brutality

To be brutal is to be cruel and merciless. Police brutality is therefore defined as a civil rights violation where police officers exercise undue or excessive force against a subject. This includes, but is not limited to, physical or verbal harassment, physical or mental injury, property damage and death. In general terms, police

brutality is the unwarranted or excessive and often illegal use of force against civilians by police officers. Police brutality is one of several forms of police misconduct which involves undue violence by police officers. Widespread police brutality exists in many countries and territories. For instance Michael Brown in Ferguson (USA) was shot and killed by police officer on duty in Ferguson, Missouri America on August 9, 2014 (Washington post, 2014). But Police brutality in Nigeria is with impunity, arrogance and without remorse. Brutality erodes the emotions of pity and mercy in any individual under such a disposition. To this end, actions of most officers and men of the Nigeria police force can be rightly equated to being brutal which is an obvious irony and obstacle to the acclaimed friendship of the Nigeria police. Police brutality summarises the diverse but recurrent cases of killing, torture, molestation and sexual harassment of the supposed friend. We shall give few instances here to corroborate these facts.

On Tuesday 4th January 2005, journalists who came to the PDP national secretariat to cover the National Executive Council meeting over the Anambra state crises were rough-handled by mobile police men, their cameras smashed and one of them beaten to coma and rushed to the hospital.” On the 19th of April 2009, the father of a 16 year old boy arrested in Onitsha, Anambra State, narrated his experience with the Nigerian police. According to him, the police told me they had arrested my son in a robbery.... He was severely beaten. He had wounds on his back and on his body. My son told me they put a stick between his arms and legs and suspended him. If I didn't pay they would've killed him. He is the only son I have, (Human Rights Watch, 2009). After I paid the money, they released the boy to me. No bail bond, no statement, nothing. The frequency of such acts has led many Nigerians to become as complacent about most common forms of police abuse as they are distrustful of the police. The threats and abuses committed by members of the police force have left many Nigerians fearful of their supposed protectors as police brandishing firearms routinely demand that market traders, couriers, and drivers hand over money and other valuables, or face arrest, beatings,

detention, or other abuses. On June 8, 2018, three police officers, an inspector and two sergeants, exhibited the condemnable act of brutality for which the police and virtually all security agencies in the country have become notorious. The errant policemen accused a citizen, Mr. Ademuwagun Temitope Solomon, of being a fraudster and sprayed him with tear-gas at the Chinese Town in Ojota area of Lagos (The Thinker Magazine, 2006). An asthma patient, Solomon collapsed and developed an asthmatic fit. The officers who perpetrated the act were from Area 'H' Command of the force in Ogudu, Lagos, and had been on a neighbourhood patrol assignment when the sad incident occurred. What a tragedy from the peace keeper. Mohammed Bashir, a 25 year old tailor, died while in Police custody. The incident happened at Sengere Police Outpost, under the Kofare Divisional Office, in Yola, Adamawa State. Mustapha Atiku Ribadu, a relation of the deceased, told SaharaReporters that Bashir was brutalised to death in the hands of a Police officer, simply identified as 'Kaka', for refusing to confess to a crime. (Vanguard, 11 June, 2018).

It was in view of this illegal detention, harrassment, brutality and extortion that the former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Walter Onnoghen, directed that Chief Magistrates should periodically inspect police stations and other detention centres in their domains, to curb growing level of citizen maltreatment by police and other security agencies. This followed what he described as the “frightening proportions” of “horrific incidents of police brutality, inordinate arrest, detention and extortion of innocent Nigerians by officers across the country in recent time” (The punch, June 28, 2018).

Nigerian Police Extra-Judicial Killings

Extra-judicial killing involves the killing of a person by governmental authorities or individuals without the sanction of any judicial proceeding or legal process. It is defined as deliberated killing not authorized by previous judgement pronounced by a regular constituted court affording all the judicial gurrantees which are recorngized as indispensable by civilized peopes,

(Uslegal.com). Extra-judicial killing by security agents especially the Police is now becoming a daily affair in Nigeria. A human rights group, the Office of the Citizen of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, accused the Police of being involved in the extra-judicial killing of over 40 Nigerians in 2016. Consequently, a Human rights lawyer and convener of the group, Pelumi Olajengbesi, said, The Nigeria Police Act empowers the personnel to conduct searches on anybody reasonably suspected to have committed a crime or who is in custody of anything that can amount to a breach of the peace or inimical to national security”. However, this power is not absolute (Vanguard, August, 20, 2017). Going further he laments, “we are worried today that the Nigerian Police Force tend to use this power that is vested in them by the law in a very reckless manner and that is why we are calling on the government and the leadership of the police to tame all of these officers who are abusing the fundamental rights of Nigerians across the country”. He urged the police to stop killing young people, saying the country’s future is uncertain when its youth are being wiped out indiscriminately” (Vanguard, August 20, 2017). He urged victims of police brutality to speak out and reach out to its officers, promising to defend for free, such people. The group also noted that, in Akungba, three students were killed on the basis that they refused the police to check their phones. A report by Amnesty International, indicted the Nigerian military and Police of killing no fewer than 240 people, including babies in Borno State and 177 pro-Biafran agitators (Amnesty international, 2016).

On 17th January 2019, Mr Ikechukwu Arum from Obeagu Awkunanaw Enugu South LGA of Enugu state was murdered by Mr Ekeneme, a police officer commander of Anti-cult squad for doing nothing. Okey (2018) said that the police officer Mr Ekeneme visited his house on the 13th January, 2019 by 2.am while he was sleeping with his family and forcefully arrested him, took him away even when his little daughter was crying for help for her father's freedom rather she was thrown aside and locked him up in the cell and he lasted four days in the cell. Later they collected the sum of ₦50,000 for his bail out and he died on the way to the

hospital for the treatment of the beatings they gave him. It was believed that he died as a result of the torture police gave him because many bruises were found on his body. On 21 August 2018, The National Human Rights Commission took delivery of 17 petitions from members of the public on alleged extrajudicial killings, molestation and torture by operatives of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. The Executive Secretary of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Mr Tony Ojukwu, explained that the public hearing became necessary following the directive of Vice President Yemi Osinbajo that the commission should investigate claims of human right abuses by Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (The Punch, [August 21, 2018](#)). Ojukwu cautioned that the allegations of human rights violations had huge human rights implications if nothing urgent was done to address them. Ojukwu's caution was supported by the sad event on January 28, 2018 where the Police personnel was accused of alleged murder of Mr. Collins Ezenwa at Amaraku, in Isiala Mbano Local Government in Imo State and his properties confiscated by the police (Sun newspaper, Jan. 15 2018).

Their Attorney also called for an end to the periodic arrest, detention and extortion of members of his family; the release of some moveable properties allegedly appropriated by the Police including a Toyota Avelon car, Toyota Hilux, Toyota Corolla, a Peugeot Salon car and a Lexus SUV. Furthermore, the lawyer particularly complained that after seizing the dead man's hotel at no. 23 Umunocha Street Independent Layout Enugu, the Policemen appointed their own manager, who now manages the hotel and return the proceeds to them. Again, on Monday, March 18, 2019, an 18 year old girl, Hadiyat Sikiru, was reportedly shot dead by some policemen in Adamo community, Ikorodu area of Lagos. The case of Kolade Johnson is still fresh in our memory (Vanguard, 2019).

Torture by the Nigeria Police Force

Unfortunately, the Nigeria police employs torture as one of their strategies for obtaining information from suspects. Research

conducted among 882 police detainees across the country during the military regime revealed that ‘nearly half of the accused persons interviewed stated that their arrest involved insult or abuse by the police. According to the report, significant 35.9 percent were roughly handled or slapped, 7.4 percent were beaten with a baton; and three percent were threatened with a gun’ (Ajomo and Okagbue, 1991). But police brutality persisted after military rule. Research conducted by Amnesty international in 2014 revealed that police brutality in the form of torture still remains a regular occurrence in the operations of NPF (Amnesty International, 2014). Similar research conducted by the Nigerian Human Rights Commission and the Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN) noted that about 80 percent of inmates in Police detention had either been beaten or threatened with weapons (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2000). This abuse by the police has made the police interrogation room to be commonly referred to as torture room and the officer in charge (O/C) known as officer in charge of torture (Elkanah Babatunde, 2017). When the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, visited several Criminal Investigation Department detention facilities in Nigeria, he remarked that it is difficult to find a police detainee in Nigeria who had not been tortured. James, a computer operator in Abagana who was arrested in his office by the Nigeria police, anti-cult unit, Enugwu Ukwu, on account of one of his trainee suspected of being a cultist gave account of his experience while in detention. According to him, suspects are tied with ropes and cables while suspended with a rope, nail, tooth, fingernail and toenail extractions, starvation, sitting on sharp nails and throwing hot water on wounds, shootings in the leg, foot or hand in a bid to get positive confessions from the suspects (James, 2018). Other instances of police torture against the citizens of the state abound; a young man, of about twenty three years old and who is a construction worker was awaiting trial in Enugu Prison when he was interviewed by human rights watch. He was arrested by police from his home at Agbani, a town in Enugu State, on June 18, 2004 with three male cousins, aged nineteen, twenty-one, and twenty-two. All four were accused of a robbery in the town and

taken to Agbani police station. Describing what happened, he said: At the police station we were put in an open cell with over twenty people. Our hands and legs were chained. We slept in the cell, on the floor. In the morning at 11.30 a.m. they came to take me first. They took me to the "torture room." It was a small room. They asked me to tell the truth, that I was a robber. I said I'm not a robber. So they started to torture me. They handcuffed me and tied me with my hands by my knees, a wooden rod behind my knees and hung me from hooks on the wall, like goal posts. Then they started beating me. They got a broomstick hair [bristle] and inserted it into my penis until there was blood coming out. Then they put tear gas powder in a cloth and tied it round my eyes. They said they were going to shoot me unless I admitted I was the robber. This went on for four hours. There were three policemen there, all in mufti. There was an inspector, a sergeant and a constable. The inspector was giving all the orders. After the torture I wrote and signed a statement in which I said I was not a robber. My cousins were tortured after me, in the same way, including the broom hair in the penis. At about 3.00 p.m. they took me to State CID (criminal investigation department) Enugu. The Inspector from Agbani police station handed me over with my statement. There they took my name and asked if I was a robber, that I should tell the truth. They handcuffed me and made me lie on the ground and hit my back with a cutlass and a baton. I kept saying it is not me, I'm not a robber. I spent two weeks in State CID. On August 2, 2004, I was taken to Agbani Magistrates Court No. 2. My cousins and I were charged with suspected robbery (Human Rights Watch, 2005). When Human Rights Watch met the young man in March 2005, he complained of continuing pain in his genitals, and described how he was passing blood for two weeks after the torture. He also told researchers that he had temporarily lost sight for two weeks after as a result of the tear gas. During his detention in police custody according to (Human Rights Watch, 2005), he received no medical attention. Such is what an average Nigeria passes through every now and then in the hands of the Nigeria police who is supposed to be their rights defender.

Another incidence of torture by the Nigeria police occurred in Onitsha, Anambra state on the 15th of April 2006, when a 25-year-old fuel attendant was arrested by SARS after his employer had accused him of being responsible for a burglary at their business premises. Narrating his ordeal, he told Amnesty International: “the policemen asked me to sign a plain sheet. When I signed it, they told me I have signed my death warrant. They left me hanging on a suspended iron rod. My body ceased to function. I lost consciousness. When I was about to die they took me down and poured water on me to revive me” (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Like many people arrested and detained by SARS, he was not allowed access to a lawyer, a doctor or his family during his two weeks detention. When Amnesty International asked the police authority to explain why no police officer had been suspended or prosecuted for torture, the police simply denied that any torture had taken place (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

Explaining to Amnesty International how he was arrested by the police in Enugu before being robbed of his belongings and then tortured in the custody by SARS officers, Chidi Oluchi 32, said “They told me to slap myself and, when I refused, they started beating me with the side of their machetes and heavy sticks. My mouth was bleeding and my vision became blurred,” Chidi said, who was released after he paid SARS officers N25, 500 (\$100) to be freed (Amnesty International, 2007). It could be said that police torture of the citizens has come to stay since the Nigerian authorities can not take any serious action against the police force inspite of all the reported cases of abuse against the police.

Police Human Rights Abuse and Government Insensitivity: The Case of Torture and Exta-judicila killings

The Nigerian government and the police leadership have on many occasions acknowledged many of the problems described in this report but their inability to bring to an end this nefarious activities of the Police has remain a source of concern. It looks as if the government is a toothless bulldog in the face of this problems. Several accusing fingers has been pointing to the various

misconducts of the police such as brutality, harrassment, extra-judicial killings and torture but it seems that government is looking the other way. Many cases of torture committed by the Nigeria police against the citizens has not been properly addressed or has not been addressed at all. The police every now and then commit extra-judicial killings and torture against the citizens without being held accountable for it.

On October 16, 2011, one Mr. Victor Emmanuel from Bayelsa State was shot dead by the police following his criticism of the police for extorting money from motorists on the road to his church. Mr. Victor Emmanuel was shot dead in the presence of his mother who pleaded for his son's life to be spared to no avail". After he was killed, the police removed the Bible he was holding in his hand and planted a pair of scissors in his hand to incriminate the deceased. It was expected that government should arrest the culprits and prosecute them to serve as deterrents to others who derive joy in using their power to harass and intimidate others. But as usual, they were only arrested and the rest is now history (Peter, 2019). In a related development, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on March 27, 2008 stated at the Human Rights Council that Nigeria must end extra-judicial executions by the police."(Amnesty International, 2008). In its Universal Periodic Review reports submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council in January 2009, the Federal Government of Nigeria acknowledged allegations of extra-judicial killings against members of the Nigerian security agencies, especially the police, but denied that it 'neither sanctions, nor will it allow extra-judicial killings to be carried out with impunity in Nigeria.' (Nigeria Police Watch, 2011). But it is an obvious fact that the above is taking place in Nigeria even as we speak. The government cannot claim ignorance of it. All we can say is that government is simply insensitive to the plight of the citizens.

The police on many occasions arrest, torture and sometimes kill people or groups seeking self-determination. For instance, in February 2003, hundreds of real or suspected OPC members were killed by the police and many others were arbitrarily arrested,

tortured and detained without trial for extended periods. (Human Rights Watch, 2003) Similarly, a December 2003 report by Human Rights Watch found that hundreds of MASSOB members was arrested since 1999 and that many were detained without trial for prolonged periods (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Government insensitivity towards the constant misconduct of the police simply underscores government lack of will power to enforce its powers on its constituted authorities or how can you convince Nigerians that you are trying your best when you have absolutely all the powers to bring the most needed change in the system. Government is only interested in securing themselves and their family members. If an ordinary citizen is killed or molested by the police, the government will look the other way with the case lingering ad infinitum without getting justice for the family of the molested or deceased, but if the wife or children of a government official is molested, abuse or killed, then the news will be the latest in town with government giving the police ultimatum to bring the perpetrators to book. First the culprit will be identified, dismissed by the police and then be prosecuted and all these within one week but if it involves an ordinary citizen, government will tell you they are trying their best to get to the root of the matter and this will go on for years without fruition. The government are aware of these dastardly acts by the police and yet has not done anything tangible to bring an end to it. For instance in 2019, following the death of Kolade Johnson in Lagos, Nigerian citizens through various means renewed their end SARS campaign with the famous #EndSARS campaign (Premium Times, April 1, 2019)

The SARS operatives shot dead a 36 year old Kolade Johnson at a viewing centre in Lagos. Following the end SARS campaign, the culprits were arrested, but as we speak the status of the killer policemen are not known. Subsequently, all the government could do was to rename the police unit from Special Anti-Robbery Squad to Federal Anti-robbery Squad. How can only a change in nomenclature bring about the much needed change in the police force whose soul and blood has been soaked with corruption, brutality, torture, harassment and all forms of human

rights abuse? Most of the times we hear that police officers who engaged in one crime or the other was arrested but after their arrest, what next? They are never prosecuted by the police authorities, the highest the police authority could do is to dismiss them from the force and that becomes the end of the story. After some years the culprits reemerges to continue with his wicked act. The government is expected to ensure that the dismissed officers is prosecuted and if found guilty is jailed to serve as deterrent to others, but Nigerian government does not even know what happens to a police officer after his arrest.

Similarly, in Anambra state, recurring cases of Awkuzu SARS torture, brutality and extra-judicial killing has not been addressed. On many occasions, people got missing at the SARS torture room, most people die from injuries sustained from torture. No account of the dead, missing or tortured people is given and government is aware of such incidences and kept mute. Giving his own account on what happened to him, Nwankwo Justin, a Ph.D student of Nnamdi Azikiwe University and manager of Upper Class Hotel in Anambra belonging to one Mr. Mokwe Bonaventure, who was accused of being a ritualist. Nwankwo said: "I arrived Awkuzu SARS on August 1, 2013. I tried to keep my mind alert, refusing to faint or collapse in the police van. On our arrival at SARS, I read the bold inscriptions on the wall of that Nazi camp, which reads: 'Well come to hell fire.' I quickly told myself that we are in for the worst.

"I was marched straight by the almighty O.C SARS to an open hall. All other victims were separated, each to his or her fate. Standing by one end was a police officer with two suspects who were chained together and the tempo of the interrogation was getting higher. Momentarily forgetting my own ordeal, I looked around the hall, which looked like a torture camp. Ropes were streaming down from ceiling tops, bags of sand were elevated on perimeter wall fence of the hall and all types of rod and metal in varying shapes, length and size stare at you. "We heard shouts of people from the back of the hall, screaming in pains. Buckets of water were at standby in case one faints or opts to

die before appending signature to already written statements. I was still taking in the entire facility when I was jolted back to reality by the sound of a rapid military rifle...tem! tem! tem! You no wan talk...you wan follow am go? you wan travel?’ Those were the words from the other end of the hall. I tried looking, but slaps from my Investigating Police Officer (IPO), reminded me that I was not in this camp for an excursion. That guy don travel oooo...so make you tell me the truth otherwise I go travel you. Those were the words from the officer. “Meanwhile, the O.C torture, the second-in-command and about four other police officers started asking me questions. The questions ranged from personal to academic. When I got to the point, where I was explaining that I was a PhD student, the questions suddenly ceased and the O.C shouted. Mister! Tell us what happened or I will shoot your two legs,’ I started my story of what happened but that was not what they wanted to hear. The questions were all ready and I must be categorical in my answers...Your director kills people? I said no sir! And the torture started. Ropes were tied round my two hands. My two legs were tied, then both legs and hands bended and tied together with a rod passing through in between them and then elevated to a perimeter wall. In fact, if you’ve watched a goat being prepared for suya, then you are close to getting the picture. At the turn of each question and non-compliance, a bag of sand was added at my back, to add extra weight on me.

The government has not done any thorough investigation to determine the veracity of the allegation of summary execution, torture and human rights abuse. The government insensitivity to the high handedness of the police and humiliation of the innocent citizens by the police has added feather and weight to the indiscriminate arrest, harassment, torture and extra-judicial killing of the citizens by the police. I am certain that if government visits the SARS torture room and sees its state and condition, they would be forced to overhaul the entire police architecture for their inhuman treatment of people.

Conclusion

Every day Nigeria Police violates the rights of citizens and their actions goes unchallenged. Every day citizens of Nigerian face violence, brutality, injustice and all sorts inhumanity from security agents. The citizens have lost a great deal of confidence in the Nigeria police to the extent of keeping their problems to themselves rather than reporting to the police. We should not forget that the fundamental duty of the police is to maintain internal peace and security and also working towards the extermination of societal evils which are in the overall interest of the members of the society. The citizens are to a large extent beckoned to fight for their rights not by fighting the armed Policeman physically, but reporting them to appropriate authorities. It is a truism that the report has been going on and not much is being done, but we should be reminded with the Igbo adage that everyday is for the thief but a day is for the owner. One day the culprits of human rights abuse in the police will be visited by the wrath of the law and all that they have done in the secret will be exposed.

We conclude by suggesting that the culprits of human rights violation among the officers and men of the Nigeria Police be made to face the full wrath of the law. The power of the 1999 Constitution and the Police Act which define the roles of the Nigeria Police and penalty for breaching the regulations should be invoked by the federal government for appropriate action.

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