



Wives of abducted men in Awba Ofemili community in Anambra State cry for help

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NIGERIA: ANAMBRA -

Women from the community of Awba Ofemili in Awka North local government area of Anambra have called for the release of their abducted husbands who were kidnapped between December 2019 and January 2020.

The people of the community have been battling with hardship for years as they have been in a land dispute with their neighbours of Ibite Ollor in Ezeagu local government area of Enugu State leaving the people to live in fear as their inherited land has become an issue in contention.

Although the land in dispute is rich in rice and crops such that Awba Ofemili and it said to be the largest food producer in Anambra State, still the road leading to the community is one of the worst in the state, and

Members of the community have lamented that five men arrested in the community between December 2019 and January this year are still in detention, thus forcing their wives to become emergency breadwinners.

The women whose husbands were detained narrated their stories to newsmen one after the other, thus: Mrs Janet Madubuike's husband, Mr Magnus Madubuike was secretary of Awba Ofemili Vigilante Services, and was abducted on January 28, 2020, by some people suspected to be security operatives. In the words of his wife she said: "I served

him dinner in the house at 8.30 pm and went into the room to attend to my newly born baby. The next thing I heard was shouts of distress by my mother-in-law who was crying that some people had kidnapped her only son.

“When I ran out of the house, I saw some people dragging my husband and it was later I learnt that they were men of the Special Anti Robbery Squad, SARS, Awkuzu.

“They took him to SARS office from where he was later taken to Enugu State. I pursued them as they were going because I knew that my husband had a large sum of money on him at that moment.

“As I wanted him to hand the money to me, the security men threatened to shoot me if I continued to follow them. In my presence, they forced my husband into a waiting truck and that was the last time I saw him.

“All the money on him and his mobile phone were collected as we have not been able to reach him through the phone. Since then, it has been very difficult feeding my children because I am only a housewife.

“If not for our traditional ruler, my children and I would have died of hunger as he has been assisting us financially.

“My relations who were earlier assisting us said they could no longer continue to do so because they also have their own problems to shoulder.

“My two daughters, who were supposed to take the West African School Certificate Examination, WASCE, and the Junior Secondary School, JSS, could not do so because I have no money to register them.

“My other daughter took the First School Leaving Certificate on Saturday and the possibility of his entering secondary school is doubtful as I cannot afford to sponsor her unless help comes or if they release my husband before the resumption of school.

“Unfortunately, the communal land where we farm is in dispute as Ibite Ollor community in Enugu State is laying claim to it and harassing our people there.”

Mrs Blessing Obiorah is the wife of Okesidu who was also arrested on January 28, 2020, and had a one month-old baby at the time of the arrest.

Mrs Obiora said that the baby is now eight months plus and in her pathetic story claimed that her husband was never a member of the vigilante group and not an official of the town union. She explained thus: “My husband is only a farmer. Up till now, I do not know why he was arrested. My only suspicion is that it might be in connection with the land tussle between our community and Ezeagu people of Enugu State.

“Before now, they were only harassing and abducting people in the farm, which was why I was surprised that they came to our house to arrest him. On the day he was arrested, he did not even go to the farm.”

Another report from Mrs Calsita Obitum wife of the chairman of All Progressives Grand Alliance, APGA, in Awba Ofemili, Mr Peter Obitum said he had some labourers working for him in the farm on that day and he went to give them food when the suspected thugs from Ibite Ollor pounced on them.

She said that his workers were lucky to escape, but he wasn't as he was abducted. Now it is almost one year when she saw her husband last.

Mrs Francisca Ubaka also reported that her husband went to his rice farm where he was arrested. According to her, his abductors inflicted machete cuts on him before taking him away. “I don't know the condition of that wound because we have not seen him since December last year when he was taken away,” she said.

The fifth person, who was abducted on December 4, 2019, was carrying harvested rice from the farm to his house

and it was on his second trip that he was abducted in the farm. His young wife who expressed her frustration said she does not know what to do with their two little children as she could not longer feed them. She said: "I beg for food from house to house and there is a limit one could go. At a stage, I took the children to my mother and later to my other relations just to ensure we survive. My husband is our breadwinner and it is only by the grace of God that we are still alive."

It was gathered that since the arrest of the people, the traditional ruler of the community, Igwe Ezekwesili Maduagwu has been making efforts to secure their release.

He also expressed regret that some unseen forces were behind the arrests, adding that some people in his domain were disrupting efforts to make peace in the area.