

7 years after: Akpaka family still in search of justice over sister's suspicious death
... *Allege sabotage by police, doctors, MDCN, others*
... *Accuse Health Ministry workers, other state officers of obstructing justice*

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Members of the Akpaka family of Umueze, Nimo, in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State have continued to cry out for justice over the mysterious death of their sister, Mrs. Rita Ugwuegbulam (nee Akpaka), as well as seeking explanations over a mysterious abdominal incision later discovered on her body. The family is also accusing certain persons and institutions of plotting tirelessly to obstruct justice in the suspected murder of the deceased.

The petitions seen by this reporter indicate that the entities which the bereaved family are making accusations against are the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN), men and officers of the Nigerian Police Force Enugu State Police Command (Homicide Department), Dr. S.A.R. Ohayi of Enugu State University Teaching Hospital, and Dr. Victor A. Osiatuma of Federal Medical Centre Asaba.

The deceased person, Rita, who was married to one Raymond Ugwuegbulam, was said to have died under suspicious circumstances on May 22, 2015, at her matrimonial home in Enugu. It is the suspicion of the bereaved family that their in-law, Mr. Ugwuegbulam, may have had a hand in the death of their sister in view of certain alleged actions and inactions of his, prior to and after his wife's death. Since then, the brothers to the deceased have relentlessly battled to win justice for her, all to no avail, more than seven years after the death.

Intrigues over autopsy

According to the bereaved family, they had demanded some explanations from their brother-in-law, Mr. Ugwuegbulam, regarding what they considered suspicious circumstances around his wife (their sister's) death, but he was not forthcoming with any reasonable explanation. A letter written by the family to their said in-law was sighted by this reporter. Dated May 25, 2015 and signed by the four Akpaka brothers (John, Mike, Chris and Joe), the letter demanded, among others, that Mr. Ugwuegbulam furnish his in-laws with the report of a medical diagnosis which he said had proved that his deceased wife was pregnant instead of having a suspected fibroid growth in her womb. This includes a copy of a supposed CT scan which he was said to have promised to give to one of his in-laws, Chris, but never did. The bereaved brothers also requested for explanations as to why their sister was not taken to any hospital during the said sick period that preceded her death. The writers stated "We will like to know what killed our sister. Since she was never taken to a hospital, everything up to this point is mere speculation."

Believing that their in-law was not willing to offer the demanded the explanation, the bereaved family took their next step. "When our brother in-law would not answer our questions regarding the circumstances surrounding our sister's death, we asked him for an autopsy. When he would not cooperate with us for an autopsy, we demanded for the body to conduct the autopsy ourselves. On retrieving the body from him, we discovered a crude incision on the corpse. We had no previous knowledge of the incision. We immediately reported the case to the Police Commissioner, Enugu State, for investigation to determine the cause of death," said Chris, a member of the Akpaka family.

The family informed that they started suspecting foul play from the moment the autopsy was agreed upon as the police insisted they would appoint the pathologist who would conduct the post-

mortem and that the family would not be permitted to bring their own expert even if only as an observer. Thus, one Dr. S. A. R. Ohayi of the Enugu State University Teaching Hospital was appointed by the police for the autopsy. However, following the family's insistence, Dr. Godwin Molokwu, a physician appointed by the Akpaka family, was allowed to observe the process. The autopsy was eventually conducted on October 16, 2015.

Nonetheless, the result of the autopsy rather than help resolve the suspicion surrounding Mrs. Ugwuegbulam's death, created further suspicion and compounded the intrigues that had been unfolding. The family complained that the result did not capture the cause of the deceased's death, which they claimed, was the primary reason for their seeking and paying for an autopsy in the first place. To verify this allegation, this reporter obtained a copy of the said autopsy report dated October 27, 2015 and signed by Dr. Ohayi; a close scrutiny of the document showed that information as to the cause of the deceased person's death was conspicuously absent.

But Dr. Ohayi has denied the bereaved family's assertion as to the purpose of the autopsy. In a statement of defence filed with the Medical and Dental Practitioners Investigation Panel, he claimed that the family had told him that they were only interested in knowing whether all the organs of their dead sister were present and not what caused her death.

The deceased family, however, challenged this claim, pointing out that it had always been their aim to uncover the cause of their sister's death given the suspicious circumstances surrounding that, and that their intention was always clearly made known to the police, Dr. Ohayi and every other person that has been involved with the matter. A copy of the first petition written by the family to the Enugu State Commissioner of Police through their counsel, L. C. Iguh, esq, seems to confirm the family's assertion. Dated August 25, 2015, the letter concluded, "With this revelation my clients suspect that their sister was murdered. This is therefore to most kindly request you sir to institute investigation into the cause of my clients' sister death so as to ascertain whether any heinous thing was done leading to her death."

The above also agrees with the assertion in the paragraph 15 of the Further and Better Affidavit deposed to by Mike Akpaka on behalf of the Akpaka family wherein he averred that the investigating police officer (IPO), Mrs. Roda Akpa of the Homicide Department of the force, had informed him before the autopsy that the interest of the police was to find out the cause of death with a view to uncovering possible criminal acts.

Speaking with this reporter, a senior police officer with the FCT police command who did not want his name in print averred that any autopsy done under the auspices of the police homicide department is for the sole purpose of unraveling the cause of death. "I am not aware of the matter you are referring to, probably because it happened under a different command, and so cannot confirm the veracity of any claims made. But one thing I can confidently say is that the police homicide department was established for the sole purpose of investigating and unravelling suspected murder cases. Any autopsy conducted under its authority is for the purpose of investigating murder. So I would be very surprised if a pathologist appointed by the same homicide department performed an autopsy in such a way that left out the very key objective the police was pursuing, which is finding out the cause of death," he said.

This was not the end of the intrigues surrounding the report of the autopsy performed on the body of late Mrs. Ugwuegbulam. The family also complained of the vagueness of the report regarding which organs of the body were intact or missing. According to the report as authored by Dr. Ohayi, a "structure that appears fairly very large" was removed around the uterine wall. The deceased family have expressed their astonishment as to why Dr. Ohayi failed to mention the particular "structure" that was removed and have challenged him to demonstrate that the said "structure" did not include ovaries and the fallopian tube as suspected by them.

But Dr. Ohayi's autopsy report sighted by this reporter stated that "Organs (of the deceased) are anatomically complete and in their normal (anatomic) positions."

Intriguingly, however, this finding is contradicted by the report produced by Dr. Molokwu who observed the autopsy session on behalf of the Akpaka family. His report dated November 1 2015 states (in the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs): "I am surprised that the pathologist did not capture the absence of the two fallopian tubes and the two ovaries, which he substituted with 'a structure that appears fairly very large (by the space created) was avulsed from each of the left and right sides of the uterus,' which he described as normal – a subtle way of hiding the truth that the fallopian tubes and ovaries were absent... In my opinion, what happened on autopsy day was a mere exercise that lacks detail that will ascertain the cause of death."

In an affidavit deposed to at a Magistrate Court of Anambra State, Abagana, Dr. Molokwu gave his account of what had transpired on the autopsy table. In the 11th paragraph, he averred as follows: "That Dr. Ohayi brought out the stump of a uterus with left and right incisions marking the position of the two fallopian tubes that were removed and called it complete but could not show me the adnesia (the two fallopian tubes and the ovaries)."

Instructively, Dr. Molokwu has alleged that the police and Dr. Ohayi had made frantic efforts to exclude him from the autopsy, and even when he was eventually allowed to be in the autopsy room, Dr. Ohayi was "uncooperative" all through. But Dr. Ohayi has denied these claims, alleging that he was only initially concerned that he was not given any prior information that a doctor was coming to observe the procedure on behalf of the deceased's family.

The family, however, described Dr. Ohayi's claim as "a blatant lie" insisting that he was part of the negotiation and the consequent agreement that the family could bring an observer since the police did not accede to their request to bring their own pathologist.

Also speaking to this reporter, Dr. Molokwu gave a detailed account of how Dr. Ohayi remained hostile and acted in a suspicious manner all through. "We scheduled the autopsy for 9am. I got there around 8.30am but was kept waiting by Dr. Ohayi till about some minutes past 1pm. I even saw him dilly-dallying with the man suspected to have killed Mrs. Ugwuegbulam (nee Akpaka) for about two hours. At some point I was losing patience... When Ohayi eventually came and the autopsy was about to start, I brought out my ward gown which I had held folded all along. As I started putting it on while walking towards the man (Ohayi), he started shouting 'Who are you? Who are you?' Chris Akpaka's brother told him it was Dr. Molokwu, and he became mad shouting "I was not told Dr. Molokwu will be part of this..."

After all said and done, the autopsy session started with Molokwu doing the observation. The medical practitioner, however, told this reporter that the police flatly prevented the photographer procured by the family from taking pictures at the autopsy session but insisted on using their own photographer whose services the police forced the family to pay for.

Dr. Molokwu revealed that his greatest shock was, however, to come when Dr. Ohayi produced a report that was a complete misrepresentation of facts as witnessed by both of them regarding the missing organs of the deceased. He also revealed that the photographs which the bereaved family was made to pay for were not released to them by the police. This same allegation was also made by the family who stated that the police had told them that they had deleted the pictures.

Dr. Molokwu further claimed that he had later, during a phone conversation with Dr. Ohayi, appealed to his conscience to produce a report that would reflect the true findings of the autopsy regarding the missing organs, but that Dr. Ohayi had asked him "do you want them to kill him?" – referring to Mr. Ugwuegbulam, the in-law to the Akpakas, who would be in serious trouble if what was found on the autopsy table became disclosed. Dr. Molokwu said his phone was on speak-

out during this conversation, hence this implicating statement of Ohayi was clearly heard by Mr. Chris Akpaka, the deceased brother, who has as well confirmed this incident to this reporter.

One imaging, two reports

In the midst of the ensuing confusion, the family's next move was to procure a post-mortem imaging to resolve their confusion. However, this move turned out yet to add another twist to the episode. The deceased family told this reporter that they had, through their physician Dr. Molokwu, requested for a post-mortem imaging but that the report they got from Onitsha Medical Diagnostic Centre Limited showed that what was done on their sister's body was a Thoracoabdominal CT Scan. A signed request form seen by this reporter indicates that Dr. Molokwu of Due Care Hospital & Maternity, Oye Agu Abagana, Anambra State, had on October 15 2015 placed a request for a post-mortem imaging to be performed on a patient named Rita Ugwuegbulam (nee Akpaka).

But more intriguing was an allegation that Dr. Osiatuma had produced two imaging reports containing an irreconcilable contradiction regarding whether all the internal organs of the deceased were intact. This reporter saw two reports dated October 16, 2015 and bearing the name Dr. Osiatuma V. A. (Consultant Radiologist). One of the reports was without a signature and has in its 3rd paragraph the following statement, "The uterus, ovaries and contracted urinary bladder are also in place." However, the other report bearing a signature reads in the 4th paragraph: "Both ovaries were not visualized. The fallopian tubes are usually not seen on CT scan and as such cannot comment on it."

But why would Dr. Osiatuma write two different reports of a single medical examination? This reporter learnt that the second result was produced days after and backdated only after Dr. Molokwu had appealed to the conscience of Dr. Osiatuma urging him to do the right thing for the sake of the image of the medical profession. A handwritten letter dated October 25, 2015 written by Molokwu to Osiatuma was seen by this reporter. The writer expressed surprise that the scan report did not capture the calcification of the uterus and absence of the fallopian tube and the ovaries. "It is legal for a consultant radiologist to live to expectation. Therefore I urge you to examine these slides critically and do a report that will save the image of medical profession," the letter stated.

This reporter sought Dr. Molokwu's response to Dr. Osiatuma's claim that fallopian tubes are not usually seen via CT scan. He was of the view that the radiologist's choice of words was wrong. "Rather he should have said that it is difficult to see through scan," he submitted, adding, however, that better diligence and application of expertise on the part of Osiatuma would have helped in determining whether the fallopian tubes were intact or not. He mentioned that injecting a dye into the body would have helped to achieve this.

On the difference between post-mortem imaging he requested and the Thoracoabdominal CT Scan performed by Osiatuma, Dr. Molokwu explained that a post-mortem imaging is meant to scan the entire body of a deceased and not just the abdomen. He expressed surprise that the Onitsha Medical Diagnostic Centre Limited failed to do a complete body scan despite charging the Akpaka family as much as 90, 000 naira. Speaking further, he noted that the scan report left some serious gaps. "The report ought to have told us whether the wound in the abdomen occurred before or after death." Emphasising the importance of the post-mortem imaging, he said, "I told Chris (Akpaka) that I didn't want to be involved with the autopsy in Enugu unless a post-mortem imaging would be done thereafter so that whatever I would be seeing I would have a second opinion which anybody can interpret."

Even though Dr. Osiatuma was given opportunity by the Medical and Dental Practitioners Investigation Panel (MDPIP) to respond to allegations made against him by the Akpaka family

and Dr. Molokwu, he did not deny the accusation that he wrote two contradictory reports. An affidavit deposed to by him at the Asaba Division of Delta State High Court on February 1, 2016 was completely silent on this. Rather, he merely stated in the paragraph 5 that he “wrote the report of the post mortem CT scan dated 16th October, 2015 and the findings are my sincere opinion.”

No respite from the MDCN

Following their alleged unpleasant experience with the police and the duo of Dr. Ohayi and Dr. Osiatuma, the Akpaka family decided to take their complaints to the Medical and Dental Practitioners Investigation Panel (MDPIP), an investigative body under the Medical and Dental Practitioners Council of Nigeria (MDCN). A petition sighted by this reporter, dated December 8, 2015 and signed by the family’s counsel, D. C. Ononiba, esq, of Igu, Obuka & Associates, made complaints of professional misconduct against Dr. Ohayi and Dr. Osiatuma.

However, the family sources who spoke to this reporter stated that what eventually puzzled them was that after all the necessary papers were filed with the Panel, the family were left to wait for almost two years before hearing again from the Panel, who this time informed them that their petition was struck out because their affidavit did not comply with the Evidence Act. This was after the family’s counsel had written a letter of complaint to the Panel requesting it to do its job and stop the lingering delay. This reporter sighted a strong-worded letter dated November 2, 2017 from the chambers of J. O. C. Ifedi & Co., counsel to the Akpakas, calling the Panel’s attention to the fact that the parties to the petition had since July 18, 2016, more than one year earlier, completed all the formalities required for hearing of a petition in line with section 9(i) – (x) of the Standing Orders and Rules of Procedure of Medical and Dental Practitioners Investigation Panel, yet the Panel had failed to list the petition for hearing and invite the parties to appear before it with their respective witnesses in line with sections 9(xii) and 9(xiii) of the same guidelines. Endorsement on this letter showed it was received at the offices of the MDPIP on November 3, 2017 by one Mrs M. S. I. Etukudoh.

The petitioners described as shocking the reason given by the Panel for striking out their petition. A letter sighted by this reporter dated November 24, 2017 (Ref: MDPIP/708/53) signed by Dr. E. D. Abdu, secretary to the Panel, states “Your petition was struck out by the Panel ... because your affidavit dated 8th December, 2015 was found to be grossly short of the requirements of the Evidence Act.” The petitioners, however, contend that there is nowhere in the Standing Orders and Rules of Procedure of the Medical and Dental Practitioners Investigation Panel where such compliance with the Evidence Act was mentioned. This reporter obtained and perused through the said Standing Orders and Rules of Procedure to verify this claim. It was found that no such reference was made to the Evidence Act under the section 9 (Investigation Procedure) or under any of all the other sections. “We believe they struck out our case late in the process after they discovered the evidence is stacked up against their colleagues and classmate whom they were bent on exonerating and that their defences weren’t enough,” Mr. Chris Akpaka said.

This reporter sought the opinion of Mr. Joel Olokojobi, a Lagos-based legal practitioner, on the position of the Evidence Act regarding proceedings before a body like the MDIPP. His opinion is that the Medical and Dental Practitioners Investigation Panel is an administrative fact-finding body to which the provisions of the Act do not apply. He referred this reporter to the section 1(2) of the Evidence Act which provides that the Act shall apply only to judicial proceedings before any court established in Nigeria. “The MDIPP is not a court, it is not even a quasi-judicial body. Again, the Evidence Act does not even apply to all courts as seen in the paragraph C of section 1(2) which excludes the Sharia Court of Appeal, the Customary Court of Appeal, the Area Court and the Customary Court from the application of the Act unless the President or the Governor of a State gazettes an order to that effect. So, I don’t see any reason why a petition before the MDIPP

should be struck out on grounds of non-compliance with the Evidence Act, especially as its rules of procedure do not provide for this requirement,” Olokojobi submitted.

However, counsel to the petitioners, Jude Ifedi, esq, has insisted that even if the said provisions of the Evidence Act were to apply in this matter, their petition was still not defective by virtue of the Further and Better Affidavit deposed to by the petitioners on July 14, 2016, which complied with the requirements of the Evidence Act. He contended that the initial affidavit dated 8th December, 2015 must be read conjunctively and not disjunctively with the petitioners’ complaint letter of the same date, and that such reading would have revealed that the affidavit was merely part of the complaint letter and not an affidavit in the sense intended by the section 9(ii) of the Standing Orders and Rules of Procedure of Medical and Dental Practitioners Investigation Panel. He quoted the said section 9(ii) which states that “on receipt of any allegation of professional misconduct, the complainant shall be requested to put his allegations in the form of an affidavit,” arguing, therefore, that no affidavit was required at the time one files a complaint but that such is requested only after a complaint has been lodged. This, according to him, implies that “the said verifying affidavit of 8th December, 2015 could be seen as mere surplusage.” Barr. Ifedi, hence, contended that the Further and Better Affidavit of the petitioners ought to have rightly replaced the verifying affidavit. “It is curious that Dr. Abdu’s letter of 24th November 2017 (communicating the striking out of the petition) ... made no reference at all to the said further and better affidavit of Mr. Mike Akpaka which ought rightly to replace the verifying affidavit of 8/12/15. What then... is the status of the further and better affidavit?” he queried.

MDIPP scribe under scrutiny

Confronted by what seems like an unrelenting foul play around their petition, the bereaved family has been pointing an accusing finger at the Secretary of the Medical and Dental Practitioners Investigation Panel (MSIPP), Dr. Enejo D. Abdu. They alleged that he had all along constituted a cog in the wheel of justice. They have accused him of deliberately causing delay in disposing of their case as well as other underhand tactics to frustrate justice. Mr. Chris Akpaka recalled: “In January, 2016, following the failure of the investigation panel to communicate to us weeks after we filed out petition, I got our lawyer, Ononiba, to call the Secretary of the panel Dr. Abdu. The Secretary told him no action had been taken on the case. He asked our lawyer not to contact anybody else but him on the case since he was the only one to give him the correct information.

“After waiting for some time without still hearing from them, we reached out to some persons within and outside the MDCN including one Dr. George Okpagu, who around early February, 2016, advised us to file the same petition again, this time through their Lagos office, so that his friend who was the Deputy Registrar there in Lagos and former Secretary of the panel would minute on it and forward it to Abuja. Curiously, it was only after we did this that the Secretary claimed Dr. Molokwu, our key witness, was not yet contacted because the panel did not have his contact. This was surprising because Dr. Molokwu has always been a registered medical practitioner and renews his licence every year. Again, it is puzzling that the Secretary, Dr. Abdu, who spoke with our lawyer on phone the previous month, did not mention to him that they were looking for Dr. Molokwu’s contact.

“However, it was around March 2016 that Dr. Molokwu told us that a courier service contacted him to tell him his letter was addressed to Umunna Street Onitsha, an address he never used or lived at. Incidentally, the said Umunna street address happened to be that of Dr. Osiatuma and Onitsha Diagnostic Centre, who are also being accused in our petition. This heightened our suspicion of manipulations and foul play.

“We were further perplexed by the fact that the panel was unusually patient with Dr. Ohayi who waited till about the end of April 2016 to reply to our petition having been served since February 25, thus violating the 30 days maximum time allowed for such in the rules of procedure. Unbelievably, there was no consequence for this. Worse still, the said late reply came only after we started asking questions.”

Mr. Akpaka alleged that Dr. Abdu must have done all he did simply to shield his friend from facing punishment for his unprofessional conduct. “We later learned from an unofficial inside source that the Secretary Dr, Abdu had been talking to Dr Ohayi on the phone from the time the case was filed and that the two were classmates. This strengthened our belief that he has been using his position to obstruct justice in order to save the head of his friend, Dr. Ohayi,” he stated.

Petitions to higher authorities

Faced with what they saw as deprivation of their constitutional right to fair hearing by the MDPIP, the Akpaka family wrote petitions to higher authorities accusing the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN) of conspiracy and requesting for investigations into their handling of their matter. Also accused in these petitions were Dr. Osayi, Dr. Osiatuma, and officers of the Nigerian Police Force, Enugu State Command.

“When MDCN struck out our petition for trumped up and frivolous reasons, we petitioned the higher authorities viz: the President, the National Assembly, the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, the National Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the ICPC, and the IG of Police,” Chris Akpaka told this reporter. Continuing, he revealed, “Our petitions got lost at the Ministry of Health, the SGF office, the ICPC, and others. We discovered this unexplainable loss after we didn't hear from the offices we petitioned. We then filed complaints for missing petitions to the Ministry of Health and the SGF. We also wrote a complaint for the missing petitions at the ministries to the President.”

This reporter sighted copies of several letters and reminder letters addressed to the above institutions and persons by the petitioners. These correspondences, signed by counsel to the Akpaka family, had their subject matter centered around the family's complaints against the MDCN, Dr. Osayi, Dr. Osiatuma, and officers of the Nigerian Police Force, Enugu State Command. Each of the letters bears an endorsement showing when it was received by the institutions to whom it was addressed.

A couple of response letters from some of the institutions acknowledging their receipt of the petitions were also seen by this reporter. Also sighted were three letters (dated December 9, 2019, July 29, 2020, and September 24, 2021 respectively) written by the Ministry of Health to the MDCN requesting that it responds to the allegations made by the Akpaka family. According to the family, these letters were, to the best of their knowledge, not replied to.

“In 2019, we found out through informal channels that the Ministry of Health, after we filed a complaint for missing petition, assigned the case to a committee who in turn sought the recommendations of their legal department. We succeeded in tracing the case file to the legal department. The file has the reference number: TER/DM/DHS/004 and was dated June 7, 2018. I was able to talk to the lawyer assigned to give the recommendations, Barrister Emmanuel Ochum, who told me the file was awaiting recommendation requested by a committee. But soon after, this lawyer left the ministry. We still don't know what happened to the recommendations or with the committee. These are part of the questions that need to be asked,” Chris Akpaka stated.

He informed that just recently, in June 2022, the family had made another effort to trace the file, and which led them to the office of one Mr. Ejike at the legal department, but that he unexplainably became hostile, forcing them to abandon the search.

Continuing, he said, “The National Human Rights Commission closed our case without our knowledge. The lawyer whom the case was assigned to was very elusive and we have reasons to believe that she was highly compromised. The lawyer, Jennifer Suogo Aga, said they wrote us letters warning that they would close the case and another letter after the case was closed. We didn't receive any of it. We repeatedly requested for copies of the said letters and they wouldn't give them to us till this date. They are our letters and we still want copies of them. They later told us they have referred our case to their Enugu office which we find very suspicious because our main defendant is MDCN which is there with them in Abuja. We see that move as a ploy to kill the case.”

Regarding their petition to the Ministry of Justice, he said, to best of the family's knowledge, no action has been taken by the ministry since acknowledging receipt of their petition in 2019.

It was at the National Assembly that the petitioners got what seemed then like some ray of hope for justice. The family's petition was treated at the hearings of the House of Representatives Public Petition Committee, and consequently, a resolution was passed on the floor of the House. This reporter has obtained a correspondent (Ref: NASS/CAN/105/Vol.25/484) dated September 11, 2019 and signed by the Clerk of the National Assembly, M. A. Sani-Omolori, communicating this resolution to the MDCN. The correspondent addressed to the Chairman of the MDCN stated, “The House of Representatives on Thursday 39 May, 2019 debated on the above subject matter (petition by the Akpaka family) and consequently resolved that ‘the House should refer this matter to the Medical and Dental Practitioners Board for further investigation to determine the issue’.” Endorsement on the letter shows that it was received by the MDCN on September 17 2019.

The petitioners are, however, saying that they have never heard anything by way of a follow-up from the National Assembly. “Now that the MDCN seemed to have ignored the resolution, we need to find out if the National Assembly has done anything to compel them to act as directed,” said Chris Akpaka.

The authorities keep mum

As a way of further verifying the claims of the Akpakas, this reporter sent written enquiries to five of the authorities petitioned by the family to get their reactions to the allegations that they have failed to harken to their cry for justice. The enquiries were sent to the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, and the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Enquiries were also sent to the duo of the Chairman and the Registrar of the MDCN seeking update on the “further investigation” which the National Assembly mandated the Council to carry out on the Akpaka family's petition.

Nonetheless, more than two weeks after, none of the authorities has furnished any response to the enquiry. Only the office of the SGF and the Ministry of Health acknowledged receipt of the enquiry seven days after it was sent. An email from the SGF promised that “your request will be submitted for necessary action.” Nothing else has been heard from it since then.

As for the Ministry of Health, this reporter received a call from one Dr. Ogbonna N. Aruma who introduced himself as a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist. He acknowledged receipt of the reporter's enquiry to the Minister but complained that some of the documents referenced in the enquiry letter were not attached. This reporter replied that copies of those documents should be in the records of the Ministry since they originated from it. Aruma, however, kept insisting that the reporter should have attached every necessary document and also give details of the issues the Akpaka family are complaining of. He claimed that he was still new in the Ministry and that the issue in question was completely foreign to him, even as he insisted that no one is trying to cover-up any wrong done by anybody. This reporter reminded him that he is merely a journalist who is

working based on information and documents at his disposal and that it is not his duty to refresh the memory of the Ministry on an issue that had since been formally reported to it and which it had commenced its investigation into. “My interest is merely to find out the status of the investigation. The Ministry should have its record of all these things and simply refer to it and respond,” this reporter told him.

But to clear all doubts, this reporter still went ahead to pool all the requested documents together as a single PDF file, summing up to 29 pages, and sent to the Ministry’s official email address as well as to the personal WhatsApp inbox of Dr. Anuma. The documents were: three acknowledgment letters from the Ministry to the Akpaka family following their series of petitions to the Ministry, three letters from the Ministry to the MDCN requesting its response to the petitions against it, and a copy of the petition by the Akpaka family to the Ministry. A cover note that accompanied these document contained the following clarification: “As a journalist, I am getting involved in this matter only to the extent of investigating to let the public know the truth. I have spoken to several persons/institutions concerned and studied several documents related to this matter and right now I am trying to get the Ministry’s side of the story, which only the Ministry can tell having been involved with this matter for over four years.”

No reply came from the Ministry as at the time of going to press. Dr. Anuma also did not acknowledge his receipt of the documents even though he had opened the reporter’s WhatsApp message as indicated by the blue ticks that appeared almost immediately the message was sent at 11 minutes past 3pm.

Endless wait for justice

For seven years, it has been for the Akpaka family an endless wait for justice. Family sources told this reporter that the body of their sister, Mrs. Rita Ugwuegbulam, has continued to languish in a mortuary as a result of their failure yet to resolve the suspicions surrounding her death. This reporter enquired about where the corpse is being preserved but was told by the family that they have chosen not to disclose the location publicly for security reasons.

“We believe we are victim of conspiracy and corruption. We are being double-crossed at every step of the way. We want to bring our ordeal to the public domain... We’re trying to get those higher authorities to take action against MDCN particularly and others mentioned in the petitions we wrote to those higher authorities. We want those higher authorities to do their job by investigating and concluding their investigation as soon as possible,” Chris Akpaka appealed.