



TOWARDS ENDING THE SERIAL KILLING OF WOMEN IN RIVERS STATE

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A BRIEFING NOTE

Purpose

We the People has tracked and documented killings in Rivers State since April 2019. In this period, we have produced [5 detailed reports](#) on the spate of killings in the state, including the killing of ladies in hotels in the state. This Briefing Note presents contextual analysis of these murders including current responses; as well as options and recommendations to the government and the Police to address this emergent problem.

Background

Since the first quarter of the year, Rivers State has witnessed disturbing cases of killings perpetrated by state and non-state actors. Between April and August 2019, there have been 220 documented killings. More disturbing is the fact that in several of the incidents, the perpetrator(s) of these heinous crimes are unidentified and un-apprehended, effectively foreclosing the possibility of any consequences for those crimes, as well as any closure or accountability. Sadly, these atrocious killings continue on a near daily basis.

Rivers State is currently witnessing an unsettling brand of atrocious killings where women are specifically targeted. Women

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especially in their 20s and 30s are targeted and killed in circumstances that appear as serial ritual murders. In many of the cases, the victims seem strangled, and their lifeless bodies are discovered several hours or days after the crimes.

Reports indicate that the killer(s) surreptitiously lure the victims into hotel rooms with lax or no security measures. In several cases, white piece of cloth is tied around the necks, arms or legs of the victims.

This disturbing trend was first noticed in the month of June 2019, when the body of an unidentified woman believed to be in her early 30s was discovered early in the morning hours, metres away from the NIPOST office close to Garrison Bus Stop in Port Harcourt. The failure of responsible agencies to release a statement over the incident, left room for speculation, fear and confusion. Since then, the following killings have occurred;

On the 1st of August, Maureen Ewuru, a 23-year old woman was strangled to death in a hotel room at D/Line axis of Port Harcourt. Her lifeless body was discovered half naked on the hotel bed, with a white pillow-cover tied around her neck.

On the 15th of August, a young lady identified as Jennifer Nkwocha, was strangled to death in a hotel room along Woji Road, G.R.A, Port Harcourt. The victim who is believed to be in her 20s was discovered lying lifeless in the hotel room with a piece of cloth tied around her neck. The killer had already fled the scene before she was discovered.

On the 21st of August, the decomposing corpse of a woman believed to be in her 30s was dumped along Aggrey Road, in the Old Township axis of Port Harcourt. Residents said she had been missing for days. Her killers dumped her already decomposing body (likely marinated in acid judging from the manner her skin was peeling off) in the early hours of 21st August, wrapped in a black polythene.

On 4th September, the body of an unidentified girl was discovered in a Hotel at GRA, Port Harcourt. Cleaners in the hotel had gone to clean the room when the lady wearing a black dress believed to be in her 20s was found dead with her legs tied with a piece of cloth.

On September 7th, the body of Mrs. Precious Steve was dumped near Abuloma junction along Peter Odili Road. Sources said she was a business woman who had gone to deliver a product a customer ordered online, but was murdered in the process. She was discovered several hours after she had been reported missing. She was a mother of three.

On the 10th of September, the mutilated body of Blessing Mary Effiong was found in a hotel room at Rumuomasi, in Obio/Akpor LGA. Blessing was said to have gone to render some hotel service to an unidentified

man who lodged in the hotel where she worked.

On September 12th, a young woman was found dead in a hotel room at Omoku, headquarters of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA. She is believed to be in her 20s, and was discovered with her arms tied backwards, both legs tied together with a piece of white cloth.

On the 12th of September, the lifeless body of an unidentified young woman was discovered dumped at the Waterlines area of Port Harcourt. It was not immediately clear how the corpse got there but it is suspected that the murder had occurred elsewhere.

On Sunday, 15th of September, an unidentified young woman was found dead in a hotel room at Rumuola, Port Harcourt.

On 16th September, two young ladies were alleged to have been attacked and strangled at a hotel along Peter Odili Road in Port Harcourt. At least one of them is reported to have died.

Current Situation

The killing of women in the state has engendered an atmosphere of caution and dread which has been exacerbated by the response of the Police. The Police command in the state has branded the victims prostitutes¹. The immediate outcome of the statement of the Police is that the demand for accountability for the killings has waned considerably simply because the victims have been branded commercial sex workers by no less an institution than the Police. This branding is not only cruel, it is also a violation of the fundamental right of the victims. Grief-stricken friends and families have been further devastated by the branding of their dead loved ones as prostitutes.

The Police has also demanded that all hotels install CCTV Cameras at strategic locations within a three-week period.

¹<https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-49692453>

Summary of Context

* Given the uniformity of the occurrences, it is widely believed that the killings are driven by the same motive which could be for ritual purposes.

* Also given the regularity of the incidents, it is equally likely that the killings are being perpetrated by a cartel or network of people working in close collaboration.

* Contrary to the narrative by the Police, the killings are not targeted at commercial sex workers. A significant number of victims are known to have been in the hotel for other reasons.

* Also, contrary to beliefs that the killings are localized to Rivers state, at least one incident with the same brand has been recorded elsewhere. On the 4th of August, the lifeless body of a lady was found under a bed in a hotel room at the World Bank area of Owerri, Imo State.

Based on the foregoing, we recommend the following immediate actions;

1. The Police should civilly enforce strict compliance with the installation of CCTV Cameras in hotels within the state.
2. All hotels in Rivers state should introduce a policy of making copies of the photo identification of all guests for record purposes.
3. In filling out guest check-in forms, hotels should ensure that they verify the telephone numbers provided by guests.
4. All vehicles in hotel premises should be adequately documented
5. These policies should be adopted and implemented by neighboring state. It is plausible that when the killings are made impossible in Rivers state, the cartel will move elsewhere.
6. The Police should intensify its investigations to identify, apprehend and prosecute perpetrators of these crimes. The occasional cliché that the Police is 'on top of the situation' is no longer tenable.

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