



February 20, 2024

Governor Babajide Olusola Sanwo-Olu
The Lagos State Governor
Obafemi Awolowo Way
Ikeja, Lagos State
Nigeria

Via the office of the Chief Press Secretary and email: info@lagosstate.gov.ng

The killing of journalist Onifade Emmanuel Pelumi - a petition for redress

Dear Babajide Olusola Sanwo-Olu,

We, the undersigned media freedom organizations, write to seek your intervention to ensure justice for Onifade Emmanuel Pelumi, a student journalist who was killed during the 2020 #EndSARS protests.

Pelumi was a 200-level student of the Department of History at Tai Solarin University of Education, Ogun State, and an intern at Gboah TV, an online television channel based in Lagos. On October 24, 2020, Pelumi, was hit by a bullet while covering the #EndSARS protests for Gboah TV. The injured journalist [was reported](#) to have been seen in the custody of the police who were part of the Lagos State Task Force. The police later took him away in their vehicle, alongside several people arrested for allegedly infiltrating the protests to loot a COVID-19 relief facility. About a week later, on October 30, 2020, the body of Pelumi was found in a mortuary in Ikorodu, Lagos.

On November 6, 2020, his family submitted a petition before the Lagos State judicial panel that looked into police brutality against #EndSARS protesters. However, the lead counsel to the Lagos State Government, Abiodun Owonikoko (SAN), successfully objected, averring that the unfortunate events leading to Pelumi's death occurred after the dissolution of the Special AntiRobbery Squad (SARS), whose actions were the sole subject of the inquiry.

There has since been an impasse regarding the case, and no one has been held responsible for the young reporter's death. The body of Pelumi has not been released to the family for burial, and there is no sign of when or if it will be handed over. It has been three years of trauma for the deceased journalist's parents. [In a recent media interview](#), Mrs. Bose Onifade, the mother, said she has been taking sleeping pills at night to enable her to sleep.

The continued refusal to release Pelumi's body violates the family's customary right to custody of the remains of their deceased kin so that they can provide a proper burial. The lack of disclosure on the exact circumstances of the journalist's death also contravenes the [UN Principles](#) on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary, and Summary Executions. Principle 9 states that:

“There shall be thorough, prompt and impartial investigation of all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions, including cases where complaints by relatives or other reliable reports suggest unnatural death... The purpose of the investigation shall be to determine the cause, manner, and time of death, the person responsible, and any pattern or practice which may have brought about that death.”

It is against this background that we request your intervention to get Pelumi's body released to his family and ensure that the perpetrators of his killing are identified and held accountable.

The killing of Pelumi was a violation of his fundamental rights to life, respect for human dignity, and personal safety as guaranteed by Sections 33, 34, and 35 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, as amended, as well as Article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights ([ACHPR](#)); Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ([UDHR](#)) and Article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([ICCPR](#)). Further, the fact that the journalist was shot while he was carrying out his duties as a reporter is a violation of Section 39 of the Constitution of Nigeria, Article 9 of the ACHPR, [Article 19 of the UDHR](#) and Article 19(2) of the [ICCPR](#), all of which guarantee the right to freedom of expression and of the press.

In the case of [Norbert Zongo v. Burkina Faso](#), the African Court highlighted that a State's failure to investigate, prosecute, and convict those responsible for the murder of a journalist inhibits other journalists' freedom of expression. This is because it invokes fear in members of the media, hinders confidence in government institutions, and paralyzes the free flow of information.

This request for your intervention is also in line with the Nigerian government's obligation under various laws and international instruments to conduct effective and impartial investigations into incidents of attacks on journalists in Nigeria, as well as to prosecute and punish the perpetrators of such attacks. This obligation derives from Section 33 of Nigeria's Constitution; [Article 2\(3\)](#) of ICCPR and Article 66(2)(c) of the [Revised ECOWAS Treaty](#). Also, under the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, governments have a responsibility to adopt effective measures to protect and guarantee the safety of journalists. Furthermore, Article 66(2)(c) of the Revised ECOWAS Treaty and Principle 20 (1, 2, & 4) of the [Declaration of Principles](#) on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, place an obligation on governments to protect journalists, guarantee their safety and ensure effective investigation, prosecution and punishment when journalists are attacked.

Our call for justice in respect of the killing of Pelumi is also in line with Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which promotes the rule of law and equal access to justice. Specifically, Target 10 of Goal 16 encourages the protection of the right to access information and the safety of journalists.

Without accountability, Pelumi's case will add to several other unresolved killings of journalists in Nigeria, perpetuating a culture of impunity and promoting self-censorship. In this context, we request that your office act to ensure:

- Onifade Emmanuel Pelumi's remains are released to his family
- An effective and impartial investigation into the killing of the journalist and that those responsible are held to account
- Rights-respecting policing in Lagos

Yours sincerely,

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

International Press Institute (IPI)

Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)

CC: Lagos State Ministry of Information and Culture
Lagos State Ministry of Justice
Lagos State Commissioner of Police