

MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN

Sylvester Monday Anagaba

Game hunting is a jungle sport, but in this inside world known as Maximum Security prison, men are still being hunted like game. It is a cruel, dehumanizing mechanism they call rehabilitation. It is a system that is nothing more than a refined method of slavery — all the ethics of enslavement are still very much alive with us mostly in the blood of the colonial slave drivers known as wardens or prison guards.

I have been in this prison for nine years now, but something that I cannot forget until they put me inside a grave, took place on May 20th, 1995. On that faithful day there was a slaughter like I have never experienced before or read about. Forty-three men were murdered, that is, they were executed while on death row and their executions were meant to appease the then military governor of Lagos State, Colonel Oyinlola. He ordered the killing of men who by legal rights still had their appeals or the rest of their trials to go through. They were killed in cold blood by the blood thirsty men who rule the affairs or dictate the events inside this prison and the society this prison functions in. On that faithful day, though faithless to many who had never nursed the idea of meeting their end that day, the yard was peculiarly cool and deserted. Even the officer in charge of morning feeding, the checker who confirmed prisoner numbers each day, never performed these routine activities. It was not a usual morning. At about 9:00 a.m. there was sounds of chains as if a gang of slaves were been led from one section of the yard to the other to be taken out for execution.²⁰ They started firing at 10:00 a.m. and by 1:00 p.m. there was a break as a quarrel erupted between the state governor and some radical lawyers who were protesting the death of their clients, people whose cases were pending in the Appeal Court. Surprisingly, at one-thirty in the afternoon they continued their slaughter and by four o'clock that afternoon they had killed forty-three men. The prison yard became a mortuary that day; it is an experience I can never forget. The next day we saw thick blood on cloths and watched human meat being chopped off bullets from the executed men.

²⁰ Outside the walls of Kirikiri Maximum Security Prison, there is a wall of metal barrels between the wall and a long line of poles that have been dug into the ground. This is the shooting range set aside for executions of the death penalty. While the barrels prevent most bullets from hitting the prison wall, the sounds of death echo throughout the prison yard while the executions are taking place.

Years later, on May 5th, 2003, my lawyer filed a suit at the federal high court on fundamental human right challenges, asking the court if they intend for me to perpetually remain in prison. All attempts or efforts to secure freedom had been thwarted by that court for so many years. In most cases, the Nigerian court uses long adjournments and bureaucratic jargon to frustrate those lawyers who actually try to help prisoners. But I must keep persevering, I cannot languish in this place. Lately, I have once again filed a third motion at the Ikeja high court, asking for information on the standing status of my case, only to learn once again that the directorate of public prosecution (DPP), the police, and the court have yet to locate a case file for me. They do not even have a charge sheet, and worst of all, my name did not appear in the computer in the Ministry of Justice. The judge ruled that since she does not know what they are charging me with, she cannot give me bail. When I read that judgement, I became physically ill.

The warders [prison guards] here don't want us to leave. It is clear in their actions and their attitudes. They cannot help us, and when we try to help ourselves, they try their best to frustrate us. There are minimal prisoner welfare facilities. Most help comes from Nigerian non-governmental human rights organizations. Some provide us written materials but few provide medical care, which is most needed since so many prisoners are sick and the few who manage to go to the prison hospital seldom get checkups, and are too often told that there is no medication available either way. If medication is available, they ask us to buy it from them. Those who cannot afford it, die. The Federal government does supply some medication for prisoners but too often prison guards take it home, for personal use or for resale as their "Christmas Bonus." This year (2002) so far, eight people have died in the prison hospital due to the unavailability of drugs and also due to the neglect by the nurses who come to "work" to sell clothes, shoes, and wristwatches to prisoners and staff, not to take care of sick prisoners.

In a word, in here, it is about the survival of the fittest and the fittest is defined through monetary wealth. The richest of the poor people in prison are the ones who have a chance. If you do not have money, you cannot survive, as the food in here is minimal and horrible. The government does supply prison staff with some soap, mattresses, slippers, insecticides, etc. for the maintenance of prisoners, but all these things seem to belong to prison guards. They continually tell prisoners to just use what they have and to buy what we need or want. Extortion is a way of life here. Prison guards

tell prisoners that the government has not paid them salaries for months and if we the prisoners have some money somewhere in our possession, they will find it. When they don't get paid, we get searched, and family members get harassed for money if they come to visit. In order to see us, they always have to pay the guards for access anyways. This is one of the reasons there was a riot on the 13th of April 2003 at Kirikiri Medium Security Prison. Prisoners are sick and tired of such harassments. The situation is tough for us, and what keeps some of us alive is the hope that it will end someday: one way or the other, it will have to end someday.

Sadly, Motivating Monday, as the prisoners and community human rights' workers used to refer to him, passed away in 2004, inside the Maximum Security Prison hospital. Prisoners have confirmed that he was told before he died that he had earlier been diagnosed with AIDS. Prison officials failed to inform him of that diagnosis until very shortly before his death. They did not provide him with any medication; in fact, medication made available to prisoners has been consistently sold by the prison guards who work in the Kirikiri Maximum Security Prison Hospital. May Motivating Monday's soul rest in peace. His smiles will always be remembered. His positive attitude despite all the hardships, oppression, and injustice prevails in the minds of those of us who did meet him, get to know him, and become inspired by his strength.