

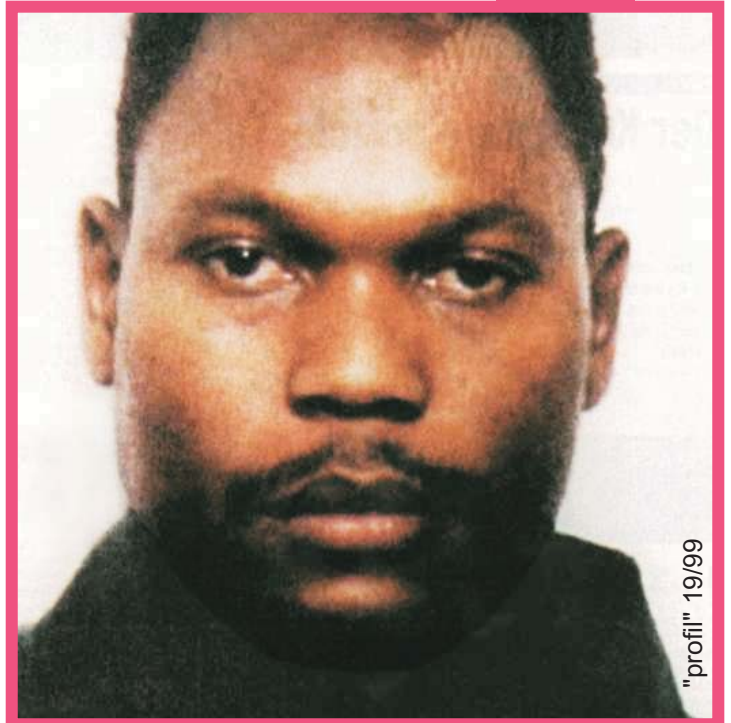
THE OMOFUMA DEPORTATION

Ten years ago this May 1st, a young African, Mr. Marcus Omofuma was killed during his deportation from Austria to Nigeria via Sofia (Bulgaria). Mr. Omofuma, 25 years old, protested against his deportation - an act which cost him his life. He was taped down to his airplane seat so tightly that he was almost totally immobile. Even his ability to breathe was greatly reduced.

Apart from the questionable legality of deportation per se, this case is a prime example of how irresponsibly the authorities sometimes deal with human life. Of protection of human dignity there is not a trace. Such treatment of any human being should not and may not be accepted in

a constitutional state of law, as Austria claims to be, even if such deportations involve criminals.

Mr. Omofuma was not a criminal.

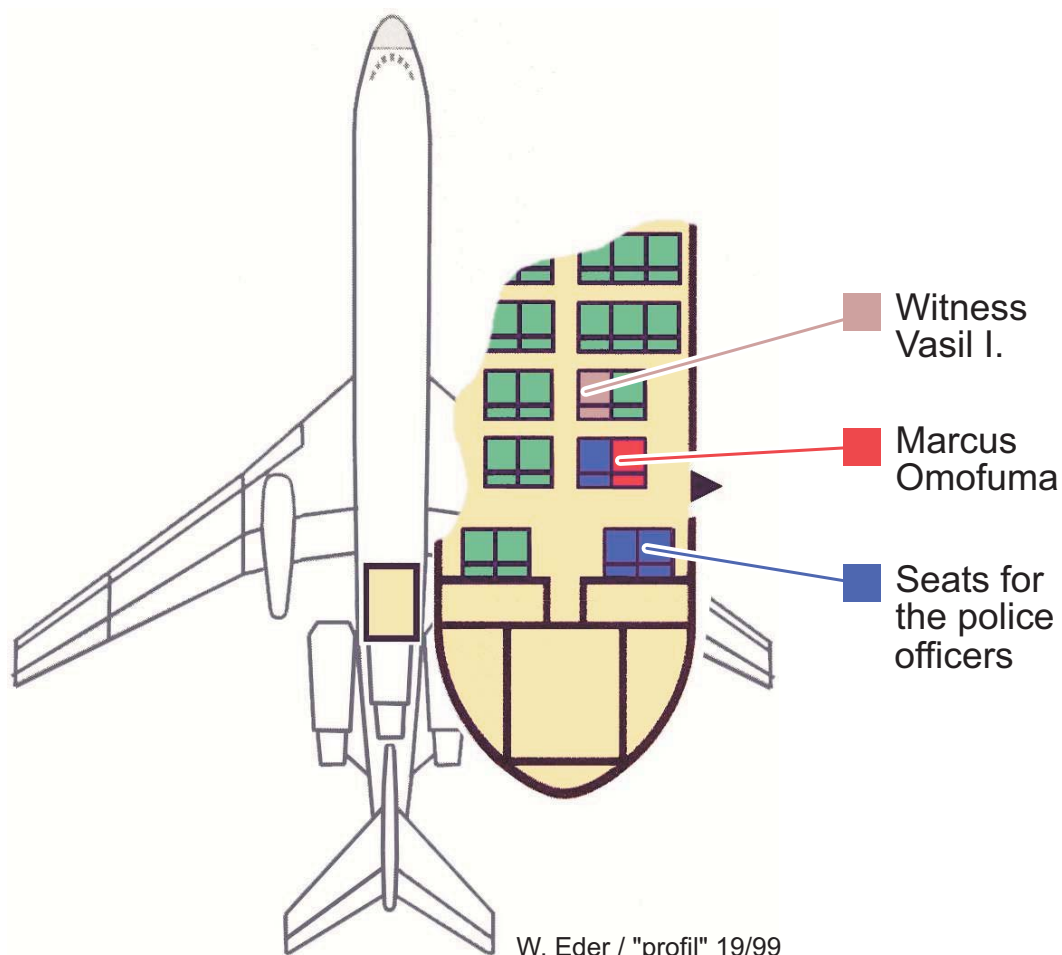




THE FACTS: Saturday May 1, 1999 - The Nigerian Marcus Omofuma is to be deported, accompanied by three officers of the Austrian Foreign Police, to Nigeria. Departure from Vienna is scheduled on Balkan Air, flight LZ 0462 to Sofia, Bulgaria with a connecting flight on to Lagos, Nigeria. Omofuma is reportedly calm throughout his transfer to the airport. Only on his arrival at the runway does he throw his head with great force against the windowpane of the car. Consequently, the Station Manager is said to have insisted that Omofuma's mouth be taped and his feet bound together (statement of the accompanying officer of the Austrian Foreign Police on May 2nd at the Austrian Embassy in Sofia). Contrary to this statement, the Station Manager maintains that he never even spoke to a member of the foreign police.

Marcus Omofuma, already taped and bound, is carried to the airplane (a witness: "taped up like a parcel"). The binding process is continued inside the aircraft. The upper body as well as the head are bound to the seat with tape. According to witnesses he is bound so tightly that because of his almost immobility, his ribcage is not able to expand and breathing must be extremely difficult. A dutch-woman later states that an officer sitting in the seat behind Omofuma even presses his foot against the back of Omofuma's seat in order to pull the tapes as tightly as possible around his chest. Additionally, it is noticed by witnesses that Omofuma is sweating profusely.

One can assume that Omofuma recognizes the hopelessness of his situation: he no longer has even the slightest possibility of communicating his needs (for example his need to use the toilette) to anyone. Probably out of panic and despair, he begins to kick the seat in front of him, in which an employee of Balkan Air is



sitting, whereupon the employee, according to a police report, becomes extremely irritated, stands up and sets Omofuma a blow to the head.

The witness Vasil I. asks one of the Austrian officers the reason for the deportation and receives the information that Marcus Omofuma is criminal and a drug dealer. An additional witness, Carlo van N., watches as an officer "binds tape ten, twenty times around his head and ten meters more around his upper body up and down". After a while, he hears that Omofuma, loudly and with extreme strength, blows air out through his nose. One of the officers obviously takes this as a sign of resistance, since he immediately screams at Omofuma, "Shut up!" Shortly thereafter, Carlo van N. hears two or three blows fall, obviously on Omofuma, but he is unable to determine who the initiator is. Three Bulgarian passengers

show their concern and voice the opinion that no human being should be treated in such a manner.

After about half an hour of flight time Omofuma seems strangely still. Concerned passengers ask the officers repeatedly, right up until time for landing, to check on Omofuma's state of health. Each time, an officer feels his pulse and answers laconically, "he's alive."

At 9 p.m. local time the Balkan Air aircraft lands in Sofia, Bulgaria. The police officers assume that Omofuma has finally given up any thought of resistance. They remove the tape bindings and order him to accompany them. Omofuma shows no reaction, whereupon the emergency doctor at the airport is summoned. Ten minutes later, at 9:18 p.m. Marcus Omofuma is pronounced dead.

Attorney Zanger states: "Omofuma's supposed resistance was, in reality, his death struggle!"

Consternation is widespread in Austria as the news of Omofuma's death breaks. The shock shown by the Austrian authorities is certainly believable, although said shock is more than likely due the fact that the case has been leaked to the public.

Immediately, Minister of the Interior Karl Schögl offers his resignation. However, Chancellor Viktor Klima as well as the "Kronen Zeitung", Austria's most widely-read newspaper, press him to stay, even against an onslaught of pressure from opposition parties.

The authorities, on the contrary, begin to build up a "wall of silence". Initially, the three foreign police officers who accompanied Omofuma are allowed to continue their normal duty. Weeks go by before they are finally suspended.

The "Kronen Zeitung" begins a verbal attack on Omofuma. "Deportee prisoner rages!" headlines the edition on May 5th, claiming as its source the "original police report".

The Bulgarian authorities state: "We call it murder".

In Sofia, the internationally renowned Bulgarian pathologist Prof. Stojcho Radanov offers his medical evaluation of the death of Marcus Omofuma. According to his findings, Omofuma definitely suffocated. Radanov's evaluation is accepted in Austria for the time being, although efforts are made to qualify his opinion, first

through the media via the "Kronen Zeitung", which attempts to raise doubt as to the quality of Radanov's evaluation, and second, through blatant attempts of the Ministry of the Interior to influence Professor Radanov personally. After several months, during which Professor Radanov vehemently refuses all attempts to influence him, a second evaluation is drawn up, this time in Vienna, by Prof. Reiter. This "contrary opinion" is more to the taste of the Austrian authorities, for Prof. Reiter suggests that a weak heart may have been the cause of Omofuma's death. "The accompanying officers had no way of knowing this" is the quick response of the defending attorney for the police, Farid Rifaat.



"Kronen Zeitung" May 5, 1999



"News" 26/99

Pius Omofuma (Brother), Felicia Omofuma (Mother), Anthony Esene (Brother in Law)

In the meantime, three close relatives of the deceased arrive in Vienna: his mother Felicia Omofuma, his brother Pius Omofuma and his brother-in-law Anthony Esene. Instead of with a welcome and condolences, the family is met at the airport with orders by the Ministry of the Interior for DNA-saliva tests, ostensibly to insure that all three persons are actually relatives of Omofuma.

The court responsible for the case orders a third evaluation from Prof. Bernd Brinkmann of Germany. In Februar 2001 the three foreign police officers resume duty with full pay, although they are moved to other areas of duty.

In May 2001, Professor Brinkmann's evaluation appears in Internet. It is a "slap in the face" for the preceding evaluation from Vienna (writes the news magazine "*profil*", Vienna). Professor Brinkmann's document confirms the original evaluation from Sofia that Marcus Omofuma did indeed die of suffocation: "...the immediate causes of death were taping of the mouth, also part of the nose,

as well as binding of the ribcage. It was a slow death, a struggle which could have lasted from 20 to 30 minutes. Even an hour is possible and cannot be ruled out."

"profil" in May 2001: "First, the three police officers forced down the convulsive jerks and the desperate struggles of the suffocating man by brutally binding his ribcage to the seat and later claimed his movements were signs of resistance. Even passengers were concerned, because not only was Omofuma's mouth taped up completely, also his nose was taped three-fourths of the way closed. Even before the examining judge, the police officers remained with their original version of acting in defence. However, when asked how in the world Omofuma, taped and bound like a parcel as he was, could have communicated with them except with bulging eyes and arteries, they were unable to answer."



In July 2001 it is decided that the three police officers are to be charged with "torture of a prisoner resulting in death".

The proceeding begins in March 2002. The police officers are sentenced to eight months with probation. This means that the officers will continue their profession.

*Werner Eder
(Translation: Gretchen Eder)*



As a direct result of these events and the resulting protest demonstrations, about three weeks later "Operation Spring" was started - an unparalleled orgy of arrests of African immigrants. Throughout the whole Austria about 100 people were accused of drug crimes, some of whom were given drastic prison sentences. The evidence was provided by anonymous witnesses.

This action, which was celebrated as a triumph against organised crime by the forces of law and order and the popular press, turned out to be a flop. However, the real objective was achieved - the Africans living in Austria were intimidated and suffer under the racist prejudices of the native populace. Again and again actions are undertaken by the police which can only be described as racist.

And again there has been loss of life. Exactly one year after Omofuma's death RICHARD IBEKWE died in unexplained circumstances while in juvenile custody. During a raid IMRE B. was shot by a policeman who justified this in an extremely questionable manner. On 3rd August 2001, in an act of desperation, JOHNSON OKPARA jumped to his death from the second floor of the juvenile prison during an interview...

*Werner Eder
(Translation: Bruce Thomas)*