

End of an era: Lasting legacy of prison officer Nelson Okwera

He served in several key prison facilities, including Dokolo Prison, Mbarara Prison, and later Lugore Prison Farm in Gulu. In each of these assignments, Nelson Lukwiya Okwera consistently demonstrated an uncompromising commitment to discipline, firm and decisive leadership.

BY GEOFFREY OYET OKWERA

Widely remembered as a firm, principled prisons officer, who was also a disciplinarian, Nelson Lukwiya Okwera, died after a courageous battle with prostate cancer. He died on January 2 after undergoing treatment at St Mary's Hospital Lacor, Gulu Regional Referral Hospital, and later at the Gulu Cancer Institute, where he spent his final days under specialised medical care.

Okwera began his distinguished service with the Uganda Prisons Service in Fort Portal Town, Kabarole District, where his career was shaped by a deep sense of duty, integrity, and commitment to institutional order. Through years of unwavering service, he steadily rose through the ranks, earning the trust of his superiors and the respect of both colleagues and inmates alike.

His tenure in the Uganda Prisons Service was marked by a relentless commitment to order, accountability, and service to the nation.

Beyond his official duties, Okwera is remembered as a steadfast leader whose influence extended beyond the prison walls, shaping the conduct and careers of many junior officers under his command. His death leaves a void in the service and in the lives of those who knew and served with him diligently.

Born on June 27, 1939, to the late Binayo Okwera of the Alero Punyono clan and his wife, the late Margaret Abwoyo, he was raised within a cultural setting that prized discipline, respect for authority, and perseverance.

Okwera was born in a family of one sister, and three other brothers. One of his brothers had already died.

These early influences shaped his character, instilling in him values that

rigid structure and demanding environment proved to be a crucible for personal transformation.

What began as routine duty gradually evolved into a profound awakening of ambition and self-belief. Exposure to responsibility, order, and leadership sharpened his outlook on life, compelling him to embrace discipline not merely as a requirement of service, but as a personal creed.

It was during this period that Okwera's mindset fundamentally shifted. He developed a heightened sense of accountability, an appreciation for hierarchy, and an unwavering commitment to self-improvement.

These formative experiences propelled him toward a clearer vision of success, one rooted in service, integrity, and steady advancement. Colleagues would later observe that his strictness and principled approach were not born of severity, but of a deeply held belief in structure as the foundation for progress.

The lessons drawn from his early service years remained with him throughout his career, shaping his leadership style and defining his interactions with both superiors and subordinates.

His journey from humble beginnings to positions of responsibility within the Uganda Prisons Service stands as a testament to the transformative power of discipline, determination, and a resolute mind committed to betterment. In every stage of his life, Okwera embodied the belief that success is earned through consistency, sacrifice, and an unyielding dedication to duty.

Family

In 1957, he was united in holy matrimony to Martha Auma; a union that

EDUCATION

Nelson Okwera began his formal education at Nwoya Church of Uganda Primary School in 1956. Driven by a desire to acquire practical skills, he later joined hands-on education at St Jos Technical College in Gulu, where he undertook Junior One studies and was introduced to technical training that emphasised discipline, craftsmanship, and applied knowledge.

became the cornerstone of a lifelong partnership built on love, resilience, and shared purpose. Together, they raised a large and close-knit family through years marked by sacrifice, discipline, and unwavering commitment to one another. God blessed their marriage with 16 children, 12 of whom are alive, while four preceded him in death.

The legacy of this union extended far beyond the immediate household. Okwera is survived by 55 grandchildren. His lineage continues to flourish through 10 great-grandchildren, proudly carrying forward the banner of his name, values, and enduring legacy.

Through his family, Okwera's life finds its most lasting testimony, one written not only in service and discipline, but in generations shaped by his guidance, principles, and quiet strength.

Education

In 1959, he advanced his technical education by enrolling at Rukungiri Technical School, further sharpening his skills and broadening his under-

standing of vocational practice. His pursuit of knowledge later extended into agriculture, a field deeply connected to community livelihood and sustainability.

From 1960 to 1961, Okwera pursued a Certificate in Agriculture at Bukalasa Agricultural College, equipping him with practical expertise that complemented his professional life and reinforced his appreciation for productivity, land stewardship, and self-reliance.

Career

In 1963, Okwera's employment path began taking shape at Alero Primary School from where he went on to become a prisons officer with Uganda Prisons Service in Fort Portal. He served in several other key prison facilities, including Dokolo Prison, Mbarara Prison, and later Lugore Prison Farm in Gulu. In each of these assignments, Okwera consistently demonstrated an uncompromising commitment to discipline, firm and decisive leadership, and strict observance of established prison regulations.

Sam Alier, one of the deceased's brothers, says these qualities not only ensured order and professionalism within the institutions under his charge, but also earned him widespread respect among colleagues, subordinates, and inmates alike, firmly cementing his professional legacy within the Uganda Prisons Service.

Okwera was laid to rest on Saturday, January 24, at his ancestral home in Layibi, Koro, Gulu City, where family, friends, and colleagues gathered to pay their final respects.

Nelson Lukwiya Okwera (2nd right) at a family event. He is survived by 12 children, 55 grand children and great-grandchildren. PHOTO/ GEOFFREY OYET OKWERA.



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Legacy. My brother was uncompromising on discipline and a decisive leader who strictly followed the regulations. That is what brought order and earned him respect from everyone—colleagues, staff, and even inmates. That is his professional legacy in the Uganda Prisons Service. —Sam Alier, the deceased's brother.