America clears Okello of prior criminal record

BY ANTHONY WESAKA & JULIET KIGONGO

KAMPALA. Authorities in the United States found no criminal record linked to Christopher Okello Onyum, the prime suspect in the murder of four toddlers at a daycare centre earlier this month.

Detective Assistant Superintendent of Police James Eserait told the High Court mobile session in Ggaba yesterday that investigators, through the office of the Deputy CID Director, Ms Beata Chelimo, formally wrote to the American Embassy in Kampala seeking background information on Okello, who had previously lived in the United States.

"The report from the Americans indicated that the embassy had no known criminal offence in their records regarding Okello," Eserait, who headed a team of investigators in the toddlers' murder, testified.

He said the report had been signed off by Mr John W Alsup in his capacity as supervisory special agent, overseas criminal investigator.

The witness, appearing for a second consecutive day, said investigators also sought to verify the authenticity of two American passports recovered from Okello's rented residence in Kyanja.

"The two passports were genuinely issued to him," he said.

Eserait further disclosed that police wrote to the Chief Licensing Officer in the Ministry of Works and Transport, Mr Winstone Katushabe, to establish whether Okello held a valid driving licence.

This followed findings that he had driven himself from Kyanja to Ggaba on the eve of the alleged attack.

"The response indicated that he only had a learner's permit, which had expired at the time," he told the court.

The witness added that investigators also examined Okello's bank accounts as part of efforts to understand his lifestyle and financial status.

Further, the 15th prosecution witness said the American report to the Inspector General of Police indicated that they had no knowledge of any of Okello's mental health challenges.

But during the cross-examination, Mr Richard Kumbuga, one of the defence lawyers, said his client had spent between eight and nine months at Butabika hospital treating mental health episodes, an assertion that the prosecution said they were not aware of.

This was after he tasked Eserait with whether he was aware that, between 2016 and 2025, his client, Okello, had episodes of mental illness.

"No, my lord, I'm not in possession of such information," Eserait replied.

Okello is facing four counts of murder for the alleged fatal stabbing of toddlers at Ggaba Early Childhood Development Programme. He has denied the charges.

Further in his testimony, the witness said they also wrote to the Internal Affairs Ministry, seeking to know the history of Okello.

Eserait said, according to his passport, Okello had last travelled out of Uganda on January 28 via the Busia border to Kenya and returned through the same border post on February 9.

According to the charge sheet, Okello is accused of unlawfully causing the deaths of Gideon Eteku, Keisha Agenorwot, worth Otim, Ignitius Sseruyange and Ryan Odeke on April 2, at Ggaba Early Childhood Development Programme in Makindye Division, Kampala.

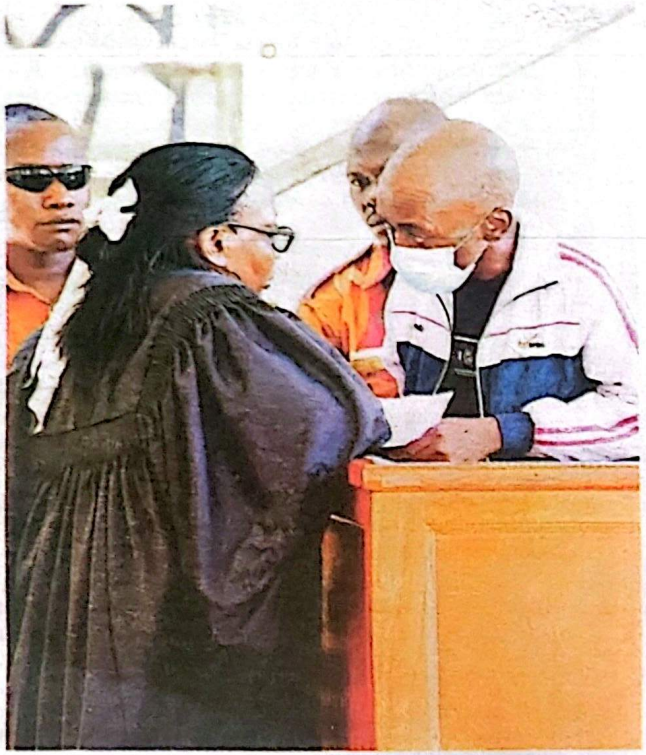
Postmortem findings indicate that the children died of hypovolemic shock resulting from deep neck wounds.

The injuries were described as severe, cutting through the skin, neck muscles, trachea, oesophagus, major blood vessels and nerves, with fractures to the vertebra and complete transection of the spinal cord.

Among the victims, Eteku and Agenorwot each suffered 14-centimetre deep neck wounds, while Agenorwot and Odeke sustained 9-centimetre wounds.

Three of the children were rushed to nearby Wentz Medical Centre but were pronounced dead on arrival.

The trial, which is being conducted in a community setting at Ggaba Community Church playground, is presided over by Justice Alice Komuhangi Khaukha and continues to draw attention due to its pace and proximity to the affected community.



Report. The report from the Americans indicated that the embassy had no known criminal offence in their records regarding Okello," – Detective ASP James Eserait

Christopher Okello Onyum speaks to his lawyers yesterday. PHOTO/ABUBAKER LUBOWA