NEW VISION 40 YEARS ANNIVERSARY

HOW NEW VISION FILES QUASHED

UNFAIR CONVICTION

As Vision Group celebrates 40 years of existence, we bring you some of the most outstanding stories that *New Vision* has covered over the years.

Joseph Batte brings you the story of Patrick Zizinga, a man who stared death in the face for a crime he never committed. His ordeal gripped the nation's heart in 2012 and still echoes today as a raw reminder of how fragile truth can be when power and greed collide.

It was October 2001, and life in Kawotto village along Entebbe Road seemed peaceful as always. But on the morning of October 20, everything changed in the most horrifying way. Residents woke up to screams echoing through the air. Chopped body parts of a woman lay scattered near a small shrine owned by a man called Edward Zimula. The pieces were bloody and cold. People covered their mouths, tears filling their eyes. No one could believe what they were seeing. Later, the woman was identified as Annet Nakiwala, a mother who had simply wanted to live her life in peace.

The day before, on October 19, Nakiwala stayed at her sister Agnes Nalutaya's home. Her marriage to Ibra Sekate had been troubled for a long time. She had left their home because of fights and misunderstandings. That evening, around 8:00pm, Sekate came to the sister's house. He spoke softly, saying he wanted to take Nakiwala to his village for special duwa prayers to fix their challenges. Nakiwala believed him. She got into his car and left. Her family never saw her alive again. Nalutaya later remembered the moment with a heavy heart. "She just wanted peace," she said, her voice breaking even years later. "She trusted him."

The next morning brought more horror. Children playing football near the shrine kicked something wrapped in a black polythene bag. When they opened it, they found the rest of the body parts. Police came quickly. They put all the pieces together. It matched perfectly. The woman's head with neat plaited hair was found near the boundary between Zimula's land and his neighbour's – the land belonging to Patrick Zizinga.

At first, fingers pointed at Sekate. Police found the weapon used and Nakiwala's clothes hidden in his latrine. It looked like an open-and-shut case. Sekate and Zimula were arrested. An identification parade was held at Katwe Police Station on October 29. Nakiwala's family pointed straight at Sekate as the man who had picked her up that night. Sekate himself pointed at Zimula as the one who walked with her toward the shrine. Both men were charged with murder and sent to Luzira Prison. In February 2002, they got bail and walked free. For a short time, it seemed justice was coming.

But Zizinga's nightmare was just beginning. He was a quiet, hardworking man who had inherited land from his late father. He lived a simple life with his wife and their children. One day, he came home to find the Police waiting. Neighbours told his wife: "Your husband has been arrested for killing his wife."

Nakibuuka stood frozen. "I am his only wife," she cried. "I never knew he had another woman. This cannot be true." Her world shattered in that moment. She felt like the ground had opened and swallowed her whole family.

In May 2002, everything turned upside down. The Directorate of Public Prosecutions changed the file. What started as Uganda versus Sekate and Zimula suddenly became Uganda versus Patrick Lwanga, also known as Tyaba Kyafa and others. The story now said Zizinga had murdered his "official wife" and scattered her body parts like trash.



Zzizinga (second-left) celebrates with his wife (second-right) and other relatives after his release on April 04, 2013. He spent over a decade in jail for an offence he never committed

NAKIWALA'S FAMILY PROTESTS

Nakiwala's family was stunned. They had reported everything to police in Kibuye right away. They knew exactly who had taken their daughter. But no one called them to court. They only read in the newspapers that the trial was happening. When they rushed to the courtroom, they saw a stranger in the dock. "That is not the man!" they shouted. "We know who her husband was. This is the wrong person!" The family felt betrayed. One relative later said with tears in his eyes: "How can you condemn an innocent man and let the real killer go free? We are poor people. Justice was sold to the rich."

The family wrote petitions. Eighteen of Nakiwala's relatives sent a letter to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). They copied it to the Chief Justice. They asked five painful questions. Why were the men who picked Nakiwala up that night freed without even coming to court? Why did police suddenly call Zizinga her boyfriend when the family only knew Sekate? Why was the family never invited to testify? Why did the dead woman's name change in court from Annet Nakiwala to Madinah Nakiwala Agnes, adding a Christian name of Patrick's real wife, who was still alive? They begged, "We are poor. The killers are rich. Please do not let an innocent man's blood be poured."

ZIZINGA CONVICTED

In 2004, the High Court found Zizinga guilty. The judge sentenced him to death. Guards led him away to the dreaded condemned section at Luzira Prison. Zizinga walked in chains, his head down, but his heart still full of hope that truth would wir Inside those cold walls, he became just another number waiting for the noose. Days turned into months, months into years. He missed his child's laughter. He missed holding his wife's hand. Every night, he lay on the hard floor and whispered prayers. "I did nothing wrong," he told himself. "God knows my heart." His wife, Nakibuuka, visited when she could. She cried outside the prison gates. "My husband is innocent," she would tell anyone who listened. "He is paying for someone else's greed."

WHY HE WAS FRAMED

But why Zizinga? Relatives, friends, and neighbours whispered the real reason. It was all about land – prim land along Entebbe Road. Zizinga had a running fight with Zimula ove 350 acres that his father had left

JOURNALIST CHARLES ETUKURI REMINISCES CASE

Charles Etukuri, the *New Vision* investigative journalist who broke the story of Patrick Zizinga in 2012, shares his personal reflections on the case that shook him deeply.

Someone came to me and said there was an innocent man locked up in prison, sentenced to death for a murder he never committed. I had just returned to *New Vision* to handle investigations and that tip hit me hard. I went straight to the editor, explained everything and he gave us the green light.

We started by going back to the scene in Kawotto village, where the crime supposedly happened. We walked the ground, talked to people and reconstructed what really took place. It became clear that the murder never involved Zizinga. He had been framed because of a bitter land dispute. Powerful people wanted his family's acres of land along Entebbe Road and they twisted the system to get rid of him.

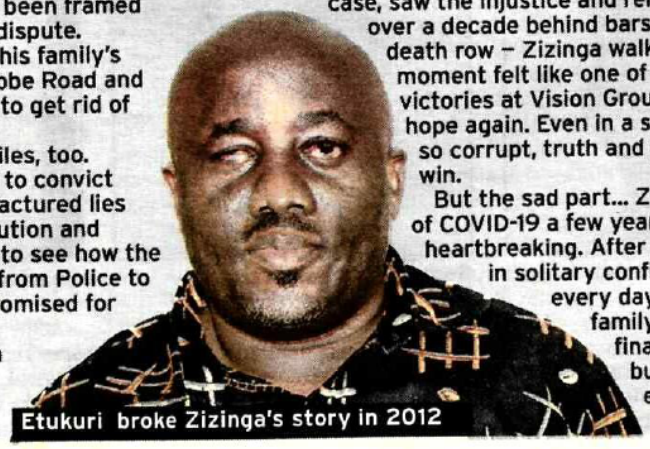
We dug into the court files, too. What evidence was used to convict him? It was fake –manufactured lies fed to the Police, prosecution and judge. It broke my heart to see how the whole chain of justice – from Police to courts –had been compromised for selfish gain.

Then we went to Luzira Prison and sat with Zizinga. Seeing him there, in the condemned section, knowing he was just months or even weeks from possible execution... it crushed me. This was a good man, a father, destroyed for nothing. He had lost everything – his freedom, his land, his reputation and even time with his children.

When the story came out, it touched so many people. I personally took it to the Chief Justice at the time, Justice Bart Katureebe. I called him, worried he might not have seen the paper. But he said, "Charles, I was looking for your number. I read it." Hearing that, I went home and cried. Tears just flowed. A man had been ruined, his life stolen and finally someone in power was listening.

The Judiciary acted fast. They reviewed the case, saw the injustice and released him. After over a decade behind bars – much of it on death row – Zizinga walked free. That moment felt like one of our biggest victories at Vision Group. It gave me hope again. Even in a system that can be so corrupt, truth and persistence can win.

But the sad part... Zizinga died of COVID-19 a few years later. It's heartbreaking. After all that suffering in solitary confinement, the fear every day, missing his family's milestones, he finally got freedom, but so little time to enjoy it.



Etukuri broke Zizinga's story in 2012