Court sentences man to death for killing girlfriend

Abomination. Thomas Nkulungira killed his girlfriend Brenda Karamuzi and hid her body in a septic tank with the help of Fred Ssempijja, a menial labourer. The High Court sentenced Nkulungira to death and Ssempijja was sentenced to five years in jail.

BY ANDREW BAGALA
abagala@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. Fumigators were spraying rental houses of Abdul Hamid Juma at Kijjwa Zone in Bukasa, Makindye Division in Kampala District on January, 2010 when they discovered a half-naked decomposing body of a woman in a septic tank.

They immediately informed the neighbours, who called the Local Council authorities and police.

The police rushed to the crime scene and began investigations.

One of the two tenants, Aziz Kakooza, told the police that he did not know the deceased. The second tenant, Thomas Nkulungira, was away.

Fred Ssempijja, a casual labourer who ran errands for the tenants, told the police that the deceased was Nkulungira's girlfriend.

He, however, denied any involvement in her death and hiding of her body in the septic tank.

Police launched a hunt for Nkulungira. They directed the landlord, Juma, to seek a meeting with him in the guise of discussing rent arrears.

Nkulungira had six months' rent arrears and Juma had locked his house two days before the body was discovered. Nkulungira promised to come but he did not.

As police were retrieving the body from the septic tank, Chris Bagaruka, a friend of Nkulungira, drove into the premises.

Bagaruka was asked about the identity of the deceased and he said he couldn't identify her because of the state the body was in.

Kabalagala Police criminal investigations officer, then Detective Assistant Superintendent of Police, (D/ASP) Prossy Namukasa, ordered the arrest of Bagaruka and Ssempijja.

Police officers were deployed to guard the house.

The duo was taken to the police station to record statements. The deceased woman was later identified as Brenda Karamuzi. Karamuzi had been missing since January 21.

D/ASP Namukasa ordered Juma to open Nkulungira's house and police conducted a search.

They found bags of the deceased hidden in the ceiling and collected other evidence.

D/ASP Namukasa used Bagaruka to lure Nkulungira to Kabalagala Police Station. Bagaruka call Nkulungira claiming that he had a problem at the police station and needed his help. When Nkulungira went to the police station, he was arrested.

A colleague of Karamuzi, Carol Nibarungi, said she told her on the evening of January 21 that she was going to Nkulungira's home where she would spend the night.

Nibarungi said four days later, she was called by Karamuzi's sister, Amanda Karamuzi, asking about the deceased's whereabouts.

It was then that she informed Amanda that the deceased left her workplace, saying she was going to spend a night with Nkulungira.

She said they called Nkulungira, who said he had also called been trying to contact Karamuzi but her mobile phones were switched off.

Nkulungira said Karamuzi spent the night at his home and he drove her to the city centre where she had an engagement, in the morning.

He said he called her in the evening to inquire whether she was already at home. "She told me that she was still in Kampala City pursuing a deal. So I continued with my errand to a vigil of a friend, Elias Kalungi, who had died in the US, at Kansanga," Nkulungira told police.

After the vigil, he said he went with his colleagues to several entertainment places before he returned home late in the night.

He said the next day he left her at his home and went to a garage in the Industrial Area in Kampala.

Nkulungira said when he tried to called her all her mobile phones were switched off.

He said he returned home but she was not there.

Police searched Ssempijja's house and discovered two SIM cards that belonged to the deceased and other identity cards. Ssempijja's wife, Joan Nakirya, was also arrested.

Mobile phone printouts of the deceased indicated that a new SIM card had been used in her mobile phone.

Nakirya said Ssempijja had sold the phone to a friend, Alex Ssali. She led the police to Ssali's home and the deceased's mobile phone was recovered.

Police tasked Ssempijja to tell them where he had got the deceased's phone.

"I stole it from her (Karamuzi) and sold it to Ssali at Shs45,000," Ssempijja said.

Ssempijja denied killing Karamuzi, saying he took her phone after Nkulungira had murdered her.

He said he bought cigarettes for Nkulungira and when he entered the house, he saw a bed sheet stained with blood.

"He asked me to help him lift the body into the car. But when we reached the car, which was parked near the septic tank, he opened the septic tank cover and put the body in it," Ssempijja said.

Ssempijja said Nkulungira promised him money if he didn't tell anyone. Ssempijja kept the secret.

Police released Bagaruka, but charged Nkulungira and Ssempijja with murder.

The duo was taken to court and remanded. Later Nkulungira was convicted of murder and sentenced to death, but Ssempijja was acquitted of that charge.

But due to his participation in the transportation of the body, Ssempijja was convicted of being an accessory to the murder and sentenced to five years in jail.



1. Police retrieve the body of Brenda Karamuzi from a septic tank at the home of her boyfriend Thomas Nkulungira. ILLUSTRATIONS BY COSMOS ARINETWE

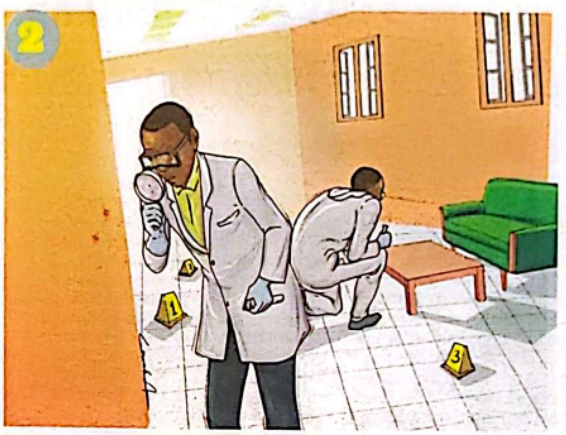
Ruling

"The offence was committed in respect of a girl, 27-years-old who went to visit Nkulungira. She was battered to death with such brutality. Life is sacred and must be respected. I therefore sentence Nkulungira to death.

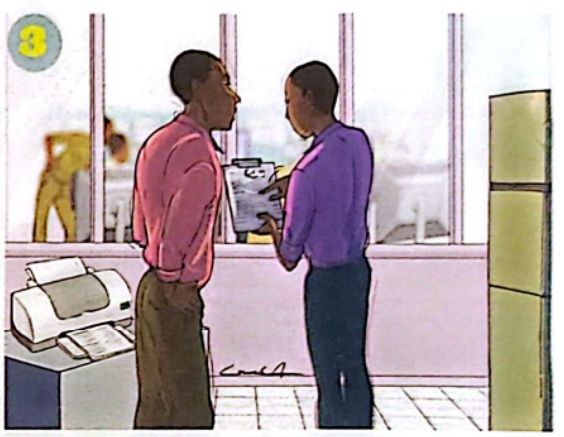
Ssempijja admitted the offence with which he was convicted. For a promise of Shs1 million, he assisted Nkulungira to hide the body of Brenda in a septic tank. He is 21 years old and a first offender.

He has spent one and half years on remand, all of which facts I have duly considered. I have noted that he has a young family but was foolish to have money make him commit the offence. I sentence him to imprisonment for five years."

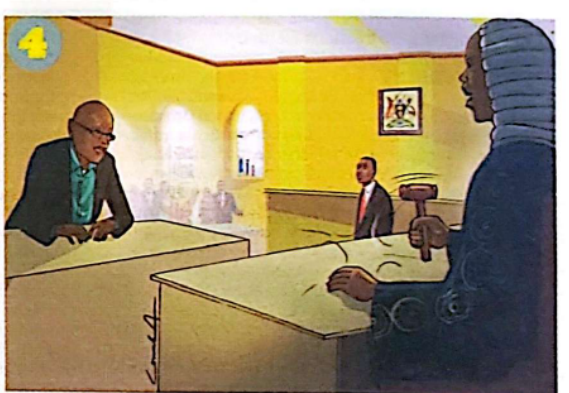
Justice Rugadya Atwoki



2. Police collect evidence from Nkulungira's house



3. Police use mobile phone printouts to gather evidence against suspects.



4. Court sentences Nkulungira to death and Ssempijja is sentenced to five years in jail