

National News

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A day in court for suspect in UCU director's murder

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BY JESSICA SABANO

It was shortly after 1.30pm on Friday when Hussein Daka Taewaiko, also known as Sam, the prime suspect in the murder of Uganda Christian University's Director of Students Affairs Pamela Tumwebaze, was brought before the Mukono Chief Magistrate's Court under tight security for the formal reading of murder and aggravated robbery charges.

Handcuffed and flanked by heavily armed personnel from the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force (JATT) and regular police, Taewaiko stepped out of an omnibus, commonly referred to as Drone. About 10 security officers, clad in black, escorted him from the vehicle to the court holding cells.

The suspect appeared calm and stone-faced as he was ushered into the holding cells, where he waited for nearly half an hour before being presented before the Grade One Magistrate. Despite being restrained and with the stakes sky-high, two stern-looking police officers armed with rifles kept him on a short leash to ensure he didn't slip through the cracks.

The youthful suspect, just 21, wore a striped pink-and-white half-sleeved shirt, grey trousers, and local crocs shoes.

Security officers had earlier indicated that Taewaiko was expected in court at 11am. He had been taken into Mukono police custody at around 10.30am, hav-



Officers from the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force (JATT) with Hussein Daka Taewaiko at Mukono Chief Magistrate's Court last Friday. PHOTO: JESSICA SABANO

ing been transported directly from Kampala to Mukono Central Police Station. From there, he was later transferred to court amid heightened security.

Inside the courtroom, more than five relatives of the deceased, alongside friends and several UCU students, gathered to witness proceedings. None of the suspect's relatives was present.

When Taewaiko entered the courtroom, emotions boiled over. Some relatives of the deceased broke down in grief upon seeing him in the dock, while he remained seemingly unbothered.

After a brief wait, Taewaiko's file was called, and he appeared before Grade One Magistrate William Muwonge. He spent about three minutes in the dock as the charges were read out, keeping his head bowed and only occasionally glancing up.

The suspect was charged with murder contrary to sections 171 and 172 of the Penal Code Act, Cap 128. The prosecution alleges that on February 11, at Gwafu West Cell, Seeta Ward in Mukono District, Taewaiko unlawfully caused the death of Tumwebaze with malice aforethought.

He also faces a separate charge of ag-

gravated robbery. Under this charge, the prosecution told the court that he allegedly robbed the deceased of a Samsung Galaxy smartphone, Shs200,000 in cash, a phone charger, 900 Ghanaian currency notes, Kenyan currency, two Botswana coins, a jean dress, a black-and-white jumper, and a black-brown leather document folder.

Because murder is a capital offence triable only by the High Court, the magistrate did not allow him to take plea. Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions Emily Nisiima informed the court that investigations were still ongoing and requested more time to gather evi-

THE KEY FACTS

Tumwebaze was reportedly attacked and strangled while asleep in her home. Taewaiko was arrested on February 14 in the eastern district of Budaka, where he was allegedly found in possession of some of the deceased's property. Tumwebaze, survived by two sons, was laid to rest on Sunday, February 15, in Mbarara District. The case file is expected to be committed to the High Court once investigations are complete, paving the way for a proper trial to determine his fate. Murder and aggravated robbery carry the maximum penalty of death by hanging upon conviction.

dence. The magistrate held that the lower court lacked jurisdiction to try the case and remanded Taewaiko to prison until March 19.

He informed the suspect of his right to apply for bail before the High Court if dissatisfied with the remand.

Taewaiko was escorted back to the holding cells. As officers waited for the cell door to be opened, they ordered him to kneel. At that moment, some relatives of the deceased rushed towards him.

One of Tumwebaze's sisters, visibly emotional, confronted him. "Sam, why did you kill my sister?" she demanded through tears.

The suspect looked at her and responded, "No," before being quickly ushered away by security personnel.

Last week, security agencies and the suspect revisited the crime scene at Gwafu West Cell in Seeta, where Taewaiko allegedly demonstrated how he accessed the deceased's home on the fateful night.

Taewaiko, according to investigators, claimed the deceased owed him Shs800,000 in arrears and that he had sought payment before the fatal incident.