He breathed heavily as he killed, witness says

The trial that kicked off on Monday, saw a caretaker yesterday narrate an ordeal from the moment she welcomed the key suspect at the school and later helplessly tried to fight him from killing the children.

BY JULIET KIGONGO & ANTHONY WESAKA

Ms Phoebe Namutebi, a caretaker at Ggaba Early Childhood Development Programme, who was the sixth prosecution witness, told court out of terror and desperation, she used the children's bicycles as shields, only to find herself staring down the same knife that had moments earlier been used on the toddlers.

Below is the slightly abridged transcription of what Ms Namutebi told the court;

Justice Alice Komuhangi Khaukha: How old are you?

Namutebi: 34.

Judge: Are you comfortable with English?

Namutebi: Luganda.

Jonathan Muwaganya (Chief State Attorney): Repeat your name.

Namutebi: Phoebe Namutebi.

Muwaganya: What do you do for a living?

Namutebi: I am a caretaker at the Early Childhood Development Centre.

Muwaganya: How long have you been a caretaker at the Early Childhood Development Centre?

Namutebi: Five years.

Muwaganya: What are your duties?

Namutebi: We receive children from their parents in the morning, we pray, sing, play, serve them food, and bathe them until they are picked up by their parents.

Muwaganya: Do you know the accused person seated opposite you (pointing to Okello)?

Namutebi: Yes, I know him.

Muwaganya: How do you know him?

Namutebi: I got to know him on April 1, 2026, at 11am.

Muwaganya: Tell the court how you came to know the accused.

Namutebi: That gentleman came to our daycare centre. He stood outside the gate as if he needed help from the daycare. When I saw him, I went to the gate where he was standing, but the gate was closed. I asked him how I could help him. He told me he was directed to bring his child to our centre. I asked him the age of the child he intended to bring, and he told me his child was about three years old. I told him we can use that option if the money is on the mobile phone. He then left.

Muwaganya: As you interacted with him on that day, where were the children?

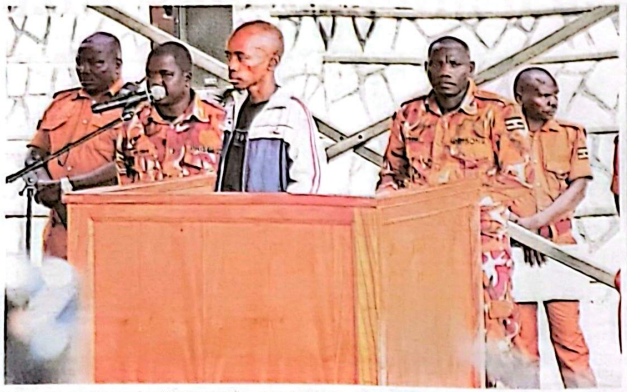
Namutebi: They were outside playing because it was break time.

Muwaganya: Other than you, were there any other adults?

Namutebi: Other caretakers were present.

Muwaganya: Were they inside?

Namutebi: They were outside.



Prime suspect in the murder of the four toddlers at Ggaba Childhood Development Programme Christopher Okello Onyum, in the dock during the public hearing in Gaba, Kampala, yesterday. PHOTOS/ABUBAKER LUBOWA

Muwaganya: What did he tell you next after the advice from other teachers?

Namutebi: He told me that they advised him to take the child to a school with many children where he can interact with others.

Muwaganya: What followed?

Namutebi: He asked me to monitor the child when he comes, and when he improves, he would take him to baby class next term.

Muwaganya: What next?

Namutebi: He asked me about the requirements needed for him to bring the child.

Muwaganya: What did you tell him?

Namutebi: Since he was going to register the child in the department of those paying money, I told him it is Shs1,200,000, Shs120,000 for registration, and Shs60,000 for uniform and a school bag where he puts the clothes after changing.

Muwaganya: Where was he when discussing this?

Namutebi: On that day, he was outside the gate. I did not open for him.

Muwaganya: What followed?

Namutebi: He told me he was going to think about it and come back to pay.

Muwaganya: On that day, you said he came at around 11am?

Namutebi: Yes. But I forgot to mention that he asked me how he could pay. I told him to pay cash in the office. He then asked me if we use mobile money. I told him we can use that option if the money is on the mobile phone. He then left.

Muwaganya: As you interacted with him on that day, where were the children?

Namutebi: They were outside playing because it was break time.

Muwaganya: Other than you, were there any other adults?

Namutebi: Other caretakers were present.

Muwaganya: Were they inside?

Namutebi: They were outside.

Muwaganya: Were they male or female?

Namutebi: Female.

Muwaganya: What happened after he left?

Namutebi: He came back the next day at the same time.

Muwaganya: What happened when he returned?

Namutebi: He again stood outside the gate just like he did a day before.

Muwaganya: What happened next?

Namutebi: Since I had seen him a day before, I approached the gate. When he saw me, he told me he had come to finalise what we had discussed the previous day and sort the payments. I opened the gate for him.

Muwaganya: Did he come with anything?

Namutebi: He had a bag for children where they carry their clothes. He told me it was the one I had asked for. I opened for him and led him to our coordinator, Ms Annet Odong.

Muwaganya: What happened?

Namutebi: She received him and gave him a seat. I introduced him and told her what we had discussed the previous day. She then interviewed him about the issues of the child.

Muwaganya: What did Ms Odong interview him about?

Namutebi: She asked for the age of the child, and he responded that he was not the father and that he was just assisting the mother, who was abandoned by the father, and that he had just come in as a good Samaritan. He said he had just come to pay and that he would send the mother of the child to come with the documentation. Ms Odong told him the money he was to pay in bits, and the accused added it up to Shs180,000.

Muwaganya: What did he use to add up the money?

Namutebi: He calculated the total mentally.

Muwaganya: What followed next?

Namutebi: Ms Odong pulled out the calculator to confirm the amount. After using the calculator, she confirmed it was true. Then he asked Ms Odong to give him the phone number on which he was to deposit the money. Ms Odong recited the number to him, and he deposited Shs195,000, with the Shs5,000 being the withdrawal charge.

Muwaganya: What else happened?

Namutebi: Ms Odong requested me to go and get a receipt book so that I can issue him a receipt.

Muwaganya: Yes, what next?

Namutebi: As I was writing the receipt, I asked him for the name of the child.

Muwaganya: Did he tell you the name?

Namutebi: He told me the name, but at first I did not hear, and I asked him to repeat. Instead, he spelled the name for me as Zuriel Onyum.

Muwaganya: Did you write the receipt?

Namutebi: I wrote it and gave it to him. Ms Odong thanked him and told him we were waiting for the child to be brought on Tuesday. He left the office and walked towards the gate. When he got there, I did not pay much attention because I thought he had already left. I bent down to open Ms Odong's drawer to put away the receipt book.

But before I did so, I looked through the window because I could see outside. I then saw the accused bending over a child who was on the ground. In my mind, I thought he was beating the child. I threw down the receipt book and rushed to where he was. I asked him why he was beating our children. Before he responded, I saw Keisha Agenorwoth Otim laying down in a pool of blood. The accused got up holding a knife in his hand.

He was so quick in what he was doing that he immediately grabbed another child. He put the child down, and I realised that he was going to murder another child.

I immediately got a bike for the children, and I threw it at him. When I threw it, he let go of the child and he came running after me. I was running while making an alarm, but I fell down. When he saw me on the ground, he left me and went back to the children.

By the time I got up, I found that he had already killed the second child. I again got a bicycle and threw it at him.

Muwaganya: When this was happening, where were the other caretakers?

Namutebi: It happened so fast...

Judge: No, tell us one by one, what they were doing.

Namutebi: One of the caretakers was cleaning the room where they had their breakfast, another had taken some of the children for a short call and was cleaning their potties. Ms Odong was in the office finishing up some reports, and the cook was in the kitchen preparing food.

Muwaganya: So, you said you were throwing bikes at him. Did they come to help you?

Namutebi: The one who was cleaning, and Ms Odong came out but could not tell why he was chasing me.

Muwaganya: Did you know the second child who was cut?

Namutebi: I did not realise who it was at first as I was running. I fell three times. I was scared. When I fell for the third time, he came close and raised his knife. I had seen him attack other children, so I thought he was going to do the same to me, and I closed my eyes. He left me, and he went back to the other children.

I was scared, so I took a long time to get up. By the time I got up, he had killed the last child and I did not see the third one because I was down. The last child I saw him cut was Ryan Odeke.

At that point, my colleagues had made an alarm, and people came to help us. Curious Bukenya, who had come to provide some work at church, was the first to arrive. Then three other people came following Bukenya. Timothy, Bushiri, and Mose, the security guy who was patrolling the whole place.

Muwaganya: Where was the accused when these four came in?

Namutebi: When Bukenya came in, he found the accused holding the last child.

Muwaganya: What happened?

Namutebi: Bukenya arrested the accused first, and the others joined him.

Muwaganya: Where did they take him?

Namutebi: They took him to the security room at the gate and locked him up because a mob had gathered and wanted to lynch him.

Muwaganya: Taking you back to the point of the arrest, where was the knife he used to kill the children?

Namutebi: When he saw the men had entered, he threw it outside the fence.

Muwaganya: Did you observe anything else as he was arrested?

Namutebi: They recovered two other knives he had kept in the socks.

Muwaganya: Anything else?

Namutebi: People began coming in, and parents came looking for their children and took them back home.

Muwaganya: What else?

Namutebi: Police came and dispersed everyone.

Muwaganya: What else?

Namutebi: Police cordoned off the premises and did not allow anyone to enter again.

Muwaganya: What else?

Namutebi: Police told me to take off all the clothes I was wearing because they were soaked in blood.

Muwaganya: How did blood get to your clothes?

Namutebi: After they had arrested the accused person, I thought I could save one of the children, and I carried Keisha. That is how I got stained with blood.

Muwaganya: Apart from the statement, you tried to save one of the children. Where did you take Keisha?

Namutebi: When I got to the gate, I realised her head had fallen back and she was dead.

Muwaganya: How about other children?

Namutebi: I left Keisha at the gate and went to see the other children, but all signs showed they were dead.

Muwaganya: What happened to their bodies?

Namutebi: There is a lady called Aunty Harriet, who brought a car that transported the three children to Wentz Medical Centre.

Muwaganya: Where was the fourth one?

Namutebi: He was left on the verandah.

Muwaganya: Why?

Namutebi: I do not know, but I think they did not know there was a fourth one.

Muwaganya: So what happened when the three were taken to Wentz Medical Center?

Namutebi: I heard a gentleman on the phone call to the centre, and he was told the children had died.

Muwaganya: As the accused was cutting these children, how was he behaving?

Namutebi: He was not saying anything but was breathing heavily.

Muwaganya: You said he came with the bag. Where was it?

Namutebi: It was on his back even throughout killing the children.

Muwaganya: And you said you issued him the receipt; had you given it to him before he left?

Namutebi: Yes, I gave it to him.

Muwaganya: If I show you a copy of the receipt, can you tell that it is the one?

Namutebi: Yes.

Muwaganya: Before I give it to you, where is the original receipt?

Namutebi: I saw the police getting it from his bag, which he was holding.

Muwaganya: When shown to you, can you tell it is the receipt you issued?

Namutebi: Yes, I can tell, the receipt has my signature, and the logo of the daycare.

Muwaganya: My lord, we pray that the photocopy of the receipt be admitted for identification.

Judge: A photocopy of Ggaba Community Church is admitted for identification.

Muwaganya: My lord, we are done with our examination in chief.

Judge: We are not going to have your cross-examined coming to 6pm. The case is adjourned to Wednesday (today) you will be cross-examined.

Court adjourns

4 CHILDREN KILLED

ARRIVAL

> When I saw him, I went to the gate where he was standing, but the gate was closed. I asked him how I could help him. He told me he was directed to bring his child to our centre. I asked him the age of the child he intended to bring, and he told me that his child was about three years old. I told him that we take care of children below three years.

ATTACK

> ...I then saw the accused bending over a child who was on the ground. In my mind, I thought he was beating the child. I threw down the receipt book and rushed to where he was. I asked him why he was beating our children. Before he responded, I saw Keisha Agenorwoth Otim laying down in a pool of blood."

Some of the community members follow the televised public court hearing.

Ms Phoebe Namutebi, a caretaker at Ggaba Early Childhood Development Programme, who was the sixth prosecution witness, makes her submission during the public court hearing.

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