

Ggaba jubilates after death sentence

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KAMPALA. Ggaba Trading Centre turned into a scene of jubilation yesterday after residents erupted in chants, songs and dance following the sentencing of Christopher Okello Onyum to death for the brutal murder of four toddlers in a case that has gripped the nation and shaken the lakeside community to its core.

Outside the mobile High Court sitting at the playground in Kampala, crowds that had gathered from early morning broke into loud celebrations immediately the ruling was delivered. As soon as Justice Alice Komuhangi Khaukha pronounced the death sentence, residents surged into the streets, banging metallic plates, saucepans, jerricans and any available household items in a rhythmic chorus of relief and triumph.

"Okello *afudde*, Okello *afudde* (Okello has died)!" children led the chants, jumping and dancing as adults joined in.

Others repeatedly called out the names of the victims, turning grief into a collective moment of remembrance and what many described as "long-awaited justice".

"Keisha, Keisha, Keisha!" one group shouted, referring to one of the murdered toddlers, as emotions spilled into both tears and celebration.

Some residents openly praised the judge and prosecution team, saying the ruling restored their confidence in the justice system after weeks of anguish.

"Where is the judge? We want to give her flowers. She has done a great job for us by delivering justice," a group of women said amid ululations and cheers.

The mood remained electric as people lined the roads, clapping, singing and dancing while chanting "Okello must die", expressing approval of the court's decision. Many said they were now only waiting for the sentence to be carried out.



People celebrate in Ggaba Trading Centre after the court judgment. PHOTOS/ABUBAKER LUBOWA

"We cannot wait for the day he will be hanged," one resident said. "This is good. It shows that those who harm our children will face the law."

When Justice Khaukha later left the makeshift courtroom under heavy security escort, the crowd erupted into even louder cheers, waving and attempting to catch a glimpse of her convoy as it sped away. Songs of praise filled the air as residents celebrated what they described as a firm stand against brutality.

Ggaba Trading Centre, which had been a scene of mourning since the killings three weeks ago, was transformed into a place of jubilation, marking what many called emotional closure for a traumatised community.

The sentencing hearing itself was



Justice Alice Komuhangi Khaukha during the court session.

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marked by moments of deep emotion. As the judge read her judgment, one of the parents of the victims broke down and had to be assisted away by court ushers. Others struggled to hold back tears as the reality of the verdict sank in.

The High Court found Okello guilty on four counts of murder and sentenced him to death for unlawfully killing Gideon Eteku, Keisha Agenorwoth Otim, Ignatius Sseruyange, and Ryan Odeke on April 2 at Ggaba Early Childhood Development Centre.

Prosecution told court that Okello, 38, had carefully planned and executed the attack, which lasted only seven minutes, describing it as deliberate and cold-blooded.

Justification

Justice Khaukha noted in her ruling that Okello was a mature adult who could have been a father to the victims, but instead chose to take their lives in a brutal manner that shocked the nation.

The court session, held in a makeshift tent, was heavily secured. Earlier in the day, some residents complained of being blocked from accessing the courtroom for lack of invitation cards, which they said had been destroyed by last week's storm.

Court Registrar Samuel Twakire acknowledged the concerns and said the matter would be addressed with security personnel.

By afternoon, however, the public viewing area had filled up, setting the stage for the emotional reaction that followed the ruling.

Okello retains the right to appeal the conviction within 14 days.