

Police give up hunt for murder convict

By George Bitu
and Betty Angatai

He may be a fugitive from the law and a former district chairperson, but the Police have apparently forgotten about Baker Ikoba Tigawalana.

When *New Vision* contacted Mayuge district Police about Ikoba, most officers feigned ignorance about the man who went missing almost eight years ago.

"I hear that name Ikoba and I am told he was a big man who would make things move. Unfortunately, that is all I know," an officer, who declined to be named, said.

The former district boss, who was attending a retreat at the National Leadership Institute (NALI) in Kyankwanzi in December 2009, disappeared minutes after the Court of Appeal overturned an earlier High Court decision to set him free.

The disappearance

In 2003, Ikoba masterminded the kidnap and subsequent murder of his friend-turned foe, Fred Nume Musiitwa.

Apparently, Musiitwa, who knew Ikoba from their school days, had information about the former chairperson's sketchy academic qualifications.

They had equally worked together at Iganga district headquarters shortly before Mayuge attained local government status in 2001.

Christopher Kubai, the former southern region Police chief, said Ikoba had attempted to elude arrest in 2003, but security used his cellphone to track him to Annesworth Hotel in Jinja town.

In 2005, a High Court session presided over by Justice Okumu Wengi acquitted Ikoba in time to retake the Mayuge district position in 2006.

His co-accused, Lt Gadaffi Yakubu Walusimbi and Private Ezironi Bwambale were found guilty by the same court of manslaughter and sentenced to 18 and seven years in jail, respectively.

As fate would have it, in December 2009, the Court of Appeal overturned Justice Wengi's ruling and convicted Ikoba for murdering Musiitwa.

In their unanimous decision, the judges stated: "The irresistible conclusion is that chairperson Tigawalana was part and parcel of the conspiracy to kill Musiitwa, that he invented and plotted it, that it was done under his supervision and it was he that ordered the killers to travel up to his home to receive payment for a job accomplished."

Another Uganda People's Defence Forces soldier, Sgt Habib Kigaanira, who had also been charged with the murder and who had allegedly confessed to having participated in the murder, died mysteriously while on remand during the.

Musiitwa was kidnapped outside the magistrate's court in Mayuge district, where he had gone to attend court.

He and Tigawalana had been long-time friends, having studied together. However, they fell out when Musiitwa filed an election petition against him. It was alleged that Tigawalana hired the killers to eliminate him before he could be ousted as district chairperson.

On January 16, 2003, Musiitwa had gone to Kityerera to attend the magistrate's court when three men, who had waited for him



Baker Ikoba Tigawalana

The former chairperson has a residence in Mayuge town council, where one of his wives lives with some grandchildren. Although Ikoba's wife had initially agreed to speak to *New Vision*, she abruptly changed her mind and left her home, thwarting efforts to have a pre-arranged interview at the location.

IKOBA'S WIFE

outside the court, kidnapped and bundled him into their waiting car outside court and drove him to Kafumbe-Mukasa Road in Kampala.

The men, who allegedly tortured Musiitwa all the way from Mayuge to Kampala, later in the evening, drove him to Bujuuko Forest on Kampala-Mityana road, where they ended his life in the most gruesome manner, according to the evidence adduced in court. The court ruled that the killers were being controlled by someone powerful. They were promised money if they carried out the mission.

After passing the pronouncement about his guilt, the Court of Appeal ordered for Ikoba's immediate arrest.

Kubai said after an arrest warrant was issued for the fugitive, he switched off his known mobile phone line and went into hiding.

Home disintegrates

Musiitwa's wife reportedly wedded another man and relocated to Mukono district almost a decade ago. Efforts to speak to her relatives who live on Kaliro Road in Iganga district proved futile as they opted to remain tight-lipped.

According to Zabulon Kafambe, a resident of Bufulubi village, the wedding took place in 2007 about five years after Musiitwa had met his fate.

Police commander speaks

Diana Namutunzi, the district police commander, explained that she moved to the district headquarters recently and, therefore, knows little about Ikoba.

"That name Ikoba is not familiar and the truth is I do not know why he ran away. Maybe his fellow politicians, know, but as far as Police is concerned, we know nothing really," Namutunzi insisted.

She promised to get updates about the missing man and be in a position to speak with certainty about him later on.

"I doubt whether the OC/CID knows much because I have been in Mayuge much longer than him," Namutunzi claimed.

She suggested that contacting the former Mayuge district Police commander could be of help as he might have some information.

When contacted over the matter, Police spokesperson, Emilian Kayima requested to be given time to find out what was on the file.

He had not got back to *New Vision* by press time.