

Court acquits two suspects in Lagos pastor's murder case

By : Eniola Daniel, April Frank-Ebikefe and Morenike Dosu **Date:** 7 May 2025 **Share :**



Justice Ismail Ijelu of the Lagos State High Court, Ikeja, yesterday acquitted Dare Abimbola and Peter Paul, who were accused of murdering Pastor Kayode Babalola in 2019.

The suspects had been charged by the Lagos State government with conspiracy to commit a felony and stealing, contrary to Section 411 of the Criminal Law, Ch, C17, Vol.3, Laws of Lagos State, 2015.

According to the prosecution, Pastor Babalola had left for work on December 11, 2019, in Oregun, Lagos State, intending to attend a night vigil afterward. However, a commercial motorcyclist reportedly dropped him at the wrong bus stop.

Around 12:00 a.m., on Ajibola Street, Alapere, Lagos, the suspects allegedly lured him to a secluded location to rob him. When they could not find money on him, Abimbola reportedly struck him with a stick, causing his death. The suspects allegedly took the deceased's two Techno phones and dumped his body near a canal in Agboyi-Ketu.

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The pastor's wife, concerned about his disappearance, reported the case to the Ketu and Alapere police stations. The investigation was later transferred to the State Criminal and Investigation Department (SCID), Yaba, Lagos, where the deceased's phones were traced to Agboyi-Ketu. Abimbola was alleged to have sold the phones to unsuspecting buyers.

During his judgement, Justice Ijelu noted that the prosecution relied solely on hearsay evidence, as no family member or eyewitness could substantiate the alleged murder or disposal of the body. The judge also highlighted the absence of concrete evidence to link the recovered phones forensically to the defendants.

"The witnesses' testimonies were based on hearsay and lacked concrete proof," Justice Ijelu stated. He added that the claims made by the witnesses were unsubstantiated, and there was insufficient evidence to prove the defendants' guilt.

In acquitting the suspects, the judge stressed the importance of substantial evidence and eyewitness accounts in criminal cases, concluding that the case lacked the necessary proof to convict Abimbola and Paul.

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