

## SOUTHWEST REPORT

## Sex, hunger, malnutrition in Agodi prison

• Ex-prisoner recounts 11 months of hell in jail

**T**HE 46-year-old indigene of Kogi State regained his freedom from jail on Monday after 11 months. With dejection and bitterness written on his face, he narrated his dehumanising experience and that of other inmates in the prison where most of them are awaiting trial for offences they allegedly committed.

A sobbing Sulaiman Awwal, who is a fire prevention consultant, recounted that overcrowding, poor food, poor health condition and mixture with hardened criminals, leave offenders worse than when they entered the prison.

He revealed that sodomy is rife within the confinement in spite of the fact that it is outlawed by the prisons authorities. Old and young innocent inmates, he explained, are lured into the act by gay inmates who are able to supply them good food in place of the poor food supplied by the Nigerian Prison Service.

"They woo themselves. There is this popular one among them called 'Oko Alhaja. The man is an armed robber awaiting trial, but has no idea when he will regain freedom," he said.

According to Awwal, the gay inmates woo new people coming into prison because they still look fresh and are alien to the culture in the prison.

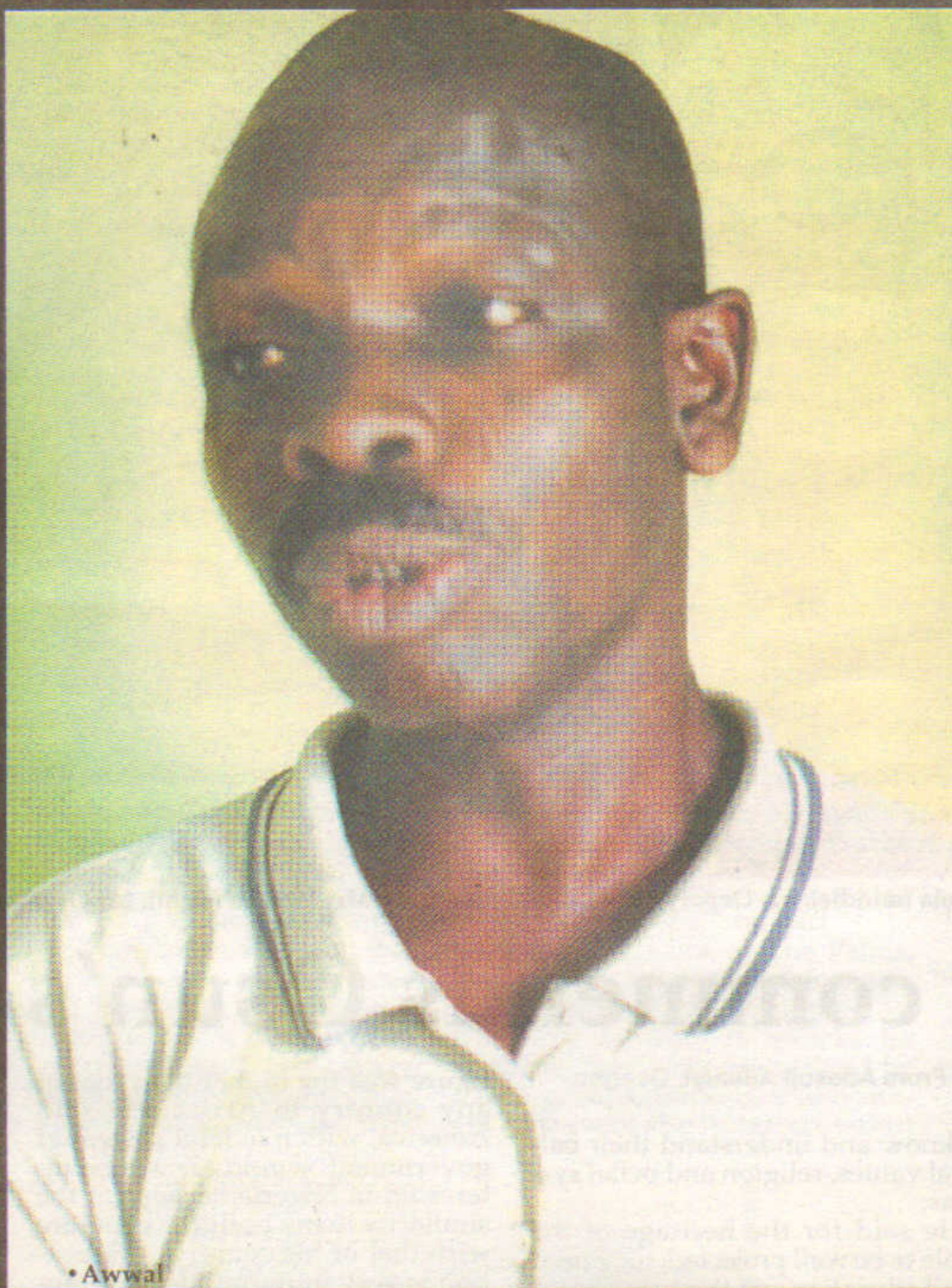
"Omo Alhaja will woo you. Because his people normally bring good food and money to him and because he has been in the prison for about 11 years, he lures new inmates to sodomy by dangling food at them. It is very effective because anyone who offers you good food in the prison is like your God. The food served inmates by the prisons is so poor that you would want to grab any good food on sight. But Omo Alhaja has enough good food and money. Hence, people easily fall for him," he explained.

The former inmate further revealed that prisoners were not supervised from 6 pm daily. He said they mate at night, using lubricants.

"But anytime they were caught, the prison authorities punished them. They are popular. We knew some of them."

Reliving how he got into prison, Awwal disclosed that he was driving from Saki to Ibadan, the Oyo State capital on January 7, this year, when

He looked somewhat unkempt but with a cool mien that offers a clue to the possibility of being a responsible man. Dark and of average height, Mr Sulaiman Awwal is an easy-going middle aged man, who is bottled up with deep bitterness about the Nigerian Prison, Agodi, Ibadan.



• Awwal

From Bisi Oladele, Ibadan

a fairly old woman ran across him in a village near Moniya, Ibadan. She was knocked down. When he stopped to rescue her, Awwal said he was mobbed by the villagers who invited a policeman.

The accident victim died before he took her to the hospital.

Awwal said he was taken to the police station from where he was charged with manslaughter on January 10. He was remanded in prison by a magistrate court since then until

Monday when he regained his freedom after the case was struck out following application for discontinuation of the case by the victim's family.

"The condition is horrible. The Agodi Prison was constructed for only 350 inmates, but as at Monday morning when I left, we were 1,795. In my cell named H1, we were 87 sleeping like frozen fish at night. The hall was constructed for only about 20 inmates. We slept on bare floor. The cells even are classified. You are given the worst cell on your first day.

That also depends on the degree of your offence. Unfortunately, the higher the magnitude of your offence, the lesser the punishment to be meted out on you by senior inmates. They beat me seriously for committing a bailable offence, when, according to them, my mates stole huge amounts of money such as N10 million, killed people, including policemen." He said.

Awwal also explained that the latrines are located at a corner of the cells and they are uncovered, leaving

the cells stinking all day.

Due to the congestion, Awwal said many people awaiting trial are lumped with hardened criminals and convicted inmates. He said the mixture opens them to the influence of the hardened criminals, from whom they learn new tricks.

Speaking on the quality and type of food served inmates by the prisons authorities, he said: "They used to serve us beans for breakfast, garri for lunch and also garri for supper. That ran from Monday to Saturday. On Sundays, we were served bread and tea for breakfast, rice for lunch and garri for supper.

Describing the quality of the food, he said: "The beans was so watery and unhygienic that you would only eat it because you do not have any alternative. As for the garri it is meant to be eba. They would pour garri into hot water and give it to us. They also gave us a piece of uncooked fish to complement it. So, the only thing to do was to open the eba and tuck the uncooked fish underneath so it can boil. The watery egusi soup they offered was irritating. You would need to first sieve it and then add salt and seasoning if you can afford them. That is the only way you can get anything tasty from it.

"Meanwhile, the quantity of all the meals is like that served a primary two pupil. That is why everyone grows pale and emaciated. It was a horrible experience," Awwal lamented.

Aside the fact that the prison does not reform, he lamented that the condition of the confined walls and the absence of help to reintegrate into the society make former inmates get more criminally minded.

Awwal called on the government to look into the prison system to ensure that innocent citizens who find themselves there do not come out to become hardened criminals.

But the Public Relations Officer (PRO), Oyo State Command of the Nigerian Prisons Service, Mr Anjorin Olanrewaju, denied that the service does not reform inmates. He explained that reformation is the centre of their activities, pointing out that a few inmates do not internalise what they learnt while in prison.