

# Lagos plumber tortured by SARS, framed for murder acquitted

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An Ikeja Special Offences Court on Wednesday discharged and acquitted a 38-year-old plumber, Anthony Bello, who was accused of murder.

Justice Mojisola Dada discharged and acquitted Anthony after the prosecution could not establish charges of murder and unlawful assembly against him.

The defendant was arraigned on two counts before the court on October 7, 2019, and he pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The offences were said to have been committed on January 23, 2012, and the defendant was arrested six years later.

Bello was accused of killing a man identified as Onome Uchenunu.

During the trial, the prosecution called two witnesses, Inspector Abimbola Ogunsoro and Inspector Bola Ebireri.

Ogunsoro, who was attached to the Ikeja Police Station, testified that she served at the Iba police divisional headquarters at the time the incident happened.

She said sometime in 2018, she was on a surveillance team patrol with her men when the team arrested one Pedro, aka Olakunle Ogunyemi.

The witness said they interrogated him because he had been on their list as a notorious criminal.

Ogunsoro further stated that Pedro made a confessional statement about the people he killed and mentioned Uchenunu as one of the victims of his gang, adding that he was stabbed to death by Anthony (the defendant).

She stated that the revelation led to a search for the defendant, who was apprehended the same night.

According to her, upon the arrest of Anthony, he shed more light on what happened.

The witness claimed that the defendant told the police that he went to watch football at a viewing centre around midnight in January 2012 and on their way back, they met Uchenunu and Pedro.

She said the defendant narrated that Pedro called Uchenunu's friend, James Adeleye, and tried to obtain his phone by force, which he was notorious for doing in that axis, then an argument ensued, which led to a fight between Uchenunu (the deceased) and Pedro.

Ogunsoro said, ”The defendant (Anthony) quickly grabbed a knife from a mallam and stabbed Uchenunu, which led to his death. After the incident, the defendant and Pedro ran away and they never came to that environment again until they were both arrested.”

She tendered a statement, which was rejected because the writer was not available and it was not endorsed by a superior officer.

The second prosecution witness, Bola Ebireri, a policeman who was attached to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, Ikeja, when the incident occurred, said the case was transferred to his office on July 31, 2018, from Iba Police Station.

He said the deceased was stabbed with a knife and he died on the spot, adding that the knife was not seen and there was no autopsy report.

The defence called two witnesses: the defendant, Anthony, and his elder brother, Philip Bello, a police officer.

The defendant stated that he was in his house around 5am and was ironing his children’s uniform when he saw some people mounting his fence.

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Anthony noted that immediately the men entered his house, they asked him the job he was doing and he said he was a plumber, but one of them slapped him and said he was a liar, accusing him of being a *Yahoo* boy (Internet fraudster).

The defendant told the court that he spent two weeks at the Iba Police Station before he was transferred to Ikeja SARS.

He said when his brother visited, he was asked to bring N10m to end the matter.

The defendant said he was tortured by the cops after the family refused to pay.

He claimed they brought a nurse to treat him when he started vomiting blood.

Anthony said, “They said they would kill me and lie to my family that I had been transferred to Abuja if my family did not come with the money.

“They also stated that because my brother was a police officer that’s why my family refused to pay. They hanged me again on a pole, with my hands and legs handcuffed and started beating me repeatedly.

“They brought me down after much torture and returned me to the cell. The IPO brought *Aboniki* to massage my hands because it was already dislocated due to the torture.

“Three days after the beating, they brought me out in the morning and asked me to sign eight papers and put me inside a cupboard. They hit me with a cutlass, then the IPO knelt in front of me and asked me to sign.

“When I asked to read what was in the book, I was slapped and I had no option but to sign my signature. After that, I was taken to Ogba Magistrate’s Court, where I was charged with cultism and murder.”

His elder brother, Philip, an Assistant Superintendent of Police attached to the Rapid Response Squad, Ikeja, said he went to see the state Commissioner of Police when he was not allowed to see his sibling.

The witness noted that he was then given attention and asked to cooperate, as the police brought a statement allegedly made by his brother.

He stated that the SARS police Inspector, Ebireri, queried his interference and demanded N10m to end the case.

During cross-examination, Philip said he was informed that Pedro mentioned his brother’s name after being compelled to name anyone who had money.

He said he told the policemen that Anthony was not into *Yahoo* (Internet fraud) and that it was their sister who lived in London, United Kingdom, that owned the house where he lived with his family.

While delivering judgment, Justice Dada held that the prosecution failed to prove the case beyond reasonable doubt against the defendant.

She said the police did not carry out any investigation into the matter as there was no autopsy presented to the court and they did not identify the deceased’s grave, neither was there any visit to the crime scene.

Justice Dada said, “There is no sufficient evidence compelling the defendant. The case of murder and unlawful assembly has not been established against the defendant. The defendant is discharged and acquitted on the two counts.”

Anthony, who wore white and had spent four years in prison custody, wept in the dock while the judge made the pronouncement.