

Four men on trial for killing cousin

11th May 2023



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A Deputy Superintendent of Police, Nurudeen Gafar, has narrated to a Lagos High Court sitting in Tafawa Balewa Square how four men allegedly killed their cousin for a money ritual.

The four defendants are Daniel Luka, Isaiah Audu, Wavi David and Ayuba Musa. They were accused of unlawfully killing one Isaiah James, by stabbing him to death with a knife.

The state government in the suit marked No: LD/10478C/2019, filed three counts of charge bordering on conspiracy to commit murder, murder and misconduct with regards to corpse against them.

They were alleged to have committed the offence on May 21, 2018, at Flower Garden, Ajah area of Lagos.

According to the charge, the offence contravened Sections 233, 223 and 165 (b) of the Criminal Laws of Lagos State, 2015.

At the commencement of the trial, Gafar who was led in evidence by the state counsel, Mr Olayemi Shofolu, narrated to the court how the defendants unlawfully killed the victim by stabbing him to death with a knife and indecently interfering with the corpse by cutting his stomach open and removing his liver.

He added that one Ebenezer who resides in one of the estates close to Ajah, introduced a herbalist (native doctor), Tubosun Shofeso, who lives in Ijebu-Igbo in Ogun State, to the defendants for a money ritual.

He stated that Shofeso, who had collected money from the defendants, asked them to get a human part for the ritual, stating that in the process of getting the human part for the herbalist, the defendants agreed among themselves with a suggestion from the second defendant that they should use his cousin.

According to him, the second defendant called his cousin on the phone to meet him at Flower Garden in Ajah.

He added, "It was their neighbour who saw James when he was rushing out that asked him where he was going because he was ill. He replied to his neighbour that his cousin called to meet him at Flower Garden, Okenla at Ajah. When the deceased got there, he met the defendants and they moved to a side of the road where someone fried yam. So, the fourth defendant said he wanted to eat yam while the first, second and third defendants told the victim that they wanted to smoke Indian hemp. After smoking, they all

moved to a swampy area. The fourth defendant lynched the victim. He held him in the throat and sliced him. When others saw that the victim had no strength, they rushed to join him. While the fourth defendant was still holding the throat, the second defendant held the victim's legs and the third defendant cut him by the side of the hand to remove his liver.

"When they brought out the severed part, they saw that it wasn't the liver, then the third defendant held his hand and noticed that the heart was still pumping, they then removed the heart and put it inside nylon. They hid and took it to Ijebu-Igbo to meet the herbalist who told them to bring a heart for money ritual. All these happened at night."

The witness further told the court that when they did not see the victim the following day, the neighbour who saw him leaving home explained to the victim's elder brother (Mike) that he left to meet his cousin who called him on the phone and they began to search for the second defendant who had already gone to Ijebu Igbo.

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"As the search continued, someone notified the victim's elder brother that he saw a lifeless body at Erinle, Ajah. When they got there, Mike found out that it was his younger brother. They thereafter went to the Police Station in Ajah to report," he said.

He further said that the victim's body was evacuated and deposited in the mortuary and the second defendant later appeared and he was taken to Ajah Police Station where he confessed and mentioned other accomplices.

He stated, "First, 3rd and 4th defendants were arrested and they volunteered statements in the presence of a lawyer from the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department."

They confessed and mentioned Ebenezer as their intermediary to the herbalist. The police went hunting for Ebenezer who they said is a bricklayer.

They confessed how they sent money to the herbalist through Ebenezer's account via POS in the area. My team and I went to Ajah to meet the POS woman. We discovered that Ebenezer collected 40,000 from them and sent N20,000 to the herbalist.

"We got the account details of the herbalist and we were able to trace him to Ijebu-Igbo. He was arrested at the bank where he wanted to withdraw the money sent to his account to lure him."

The IPO further narrated to the court that Shofeso escaped from the bank guard who held him as he came to withdraw money and was shot, adding that he died while they were about to search for his herbalist friend who wanted to help him with the defendants' money ritual request.

"All necessary coroner forms were filed and served by the Chief Pathologist in the hospital. We also fill out a form for James Isaiah, the victim," the witness said.

He also added that it was during the investigation that the police discovered that the 2nd, 3rd and 4th defendants are from Chibok Local Government Area in Borno State.

“They are all cousins, looking for quick money. They opted out to use their cousin for rituals. Shofeso was the herbalist that prepared the concoction they prepared for the victim that make him sick on May 21, before he was lured to the place where he was killed. They poisoned him. The second defendant played a significant role in killing the victim. It was well planned. Their case file was sent to the legal department before they were charged to court,” Gafar said.

When the prosecution sought to tender the defendants’ statement, their counsel objected that the statement was taken under duress.

The counsel stated that it was their contention that the statement was made involuntarily, under duress and torture. Consequently, the case was adjourned to September 26, 2023, for trial continuation.