

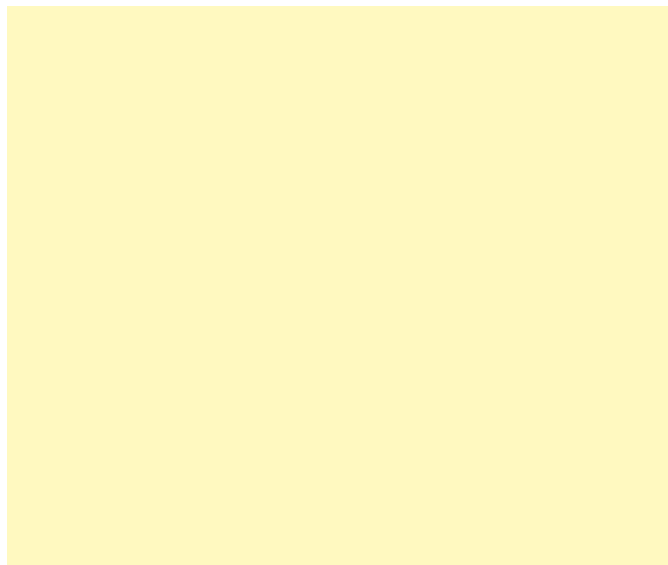
We want to go to university after passing NECO in prison, four death row inmates tell Fayose, Akeredolu

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By Daud Olatunji

Their story demonstrates that even in prison, people still bring ambitions to fulfilment. Olumide, Oluwafemi, Oluwaseun, Olusola and Ololade (real names withheld) are inmates of Abeokuta Prisons who, despite their incarceration, still found the time to pursue their education. Apart from Oluwafemi, who is serving a life sentence after being convicted for murder in Akure, Ondo state capital, the other inmates are on death row for armed robbery and murder in Ondo and Ekiti states. They just passed their National Examination Council (NECO) papers and hoped to pursue courses at the university level.



Sunday Vanguard had an encounter with them inside the Abeokuta Prisons where they shared their aspirations. The convicts pleaded with Governors Rotimi Akeredolu (Ondo) and Ayo Fayose (Ekiti) to grant them amnesty as they had turned a new leaf.

Olumide, a condemned convict, said he wanted to study political science and had C4 in civics, commerce and marketing; C5 in English, mathematics and economics and C6 in biology.

While sharing his experience, he said, "I have been here since 2013. I was convicted for armed robbery in Ondo State. I got this opportunity (education) through the



Inmates in class

authorities of the (Abeokuta) prison yard to further my education and, by the grace of God, everything worked perfectly well. I want to study political science. My ambition is to be a politician if I get state pardon. I had my secondary education in Ondo State. I have learned a lot of lessons. Crime is not a good thing; I believe God will deliver me from this place. I preach to people that crime is a dirty game, it is not good. I will be 35 on December 19”.

Oluwafemi, serving life sentence, plans to study accounting, has B3 in

geography and book-keeping; C4 in English, biology and economics; C5 in civics, government, literature in English and C6 in mathematics.

His words, “I was arrested in 2001 and the sentenced to death in 2005 but the sentence commuted to life imprisonment in 2010. I am here because of a murder case that happened in Akure, Ondo State. I have learned to desist from crime.

“My academic pursuit has been made possible through the help of the prison authorities and my total commitment. If I get state pardon, I will forge ahead with my education and look for something good to do when I graduate. I want to study accountancy. I committed the offence when I was 25 years, now I am 42. I have spent 17 years in prison. I was in OAU, 200-level studying civil engineering, before the incident that brought me here happened. If Governor Rotimi Akeredolu can help us, we will be very grateful and we will be the happiest people on earth”.

Oluwaseun, a condemned criminal who wants to study political science has B3 in geography and commerce; C4 in civics and government; C5 in English, literature in English and book-keeping and C6 in mathematics.

He said, “I committed armed robbery in Ado-Ekiti in 2012. I have learned so many lessons here and we have been taught how to be better persons. If I am allowed to go out there, i will no more go beyond my boundaries and try to make everyone happy. I want to study political science and if I get state pardon, I will work in one of these organizations; even if it is governor’s office, I don’t mind. I attended primary and secondary schools but I didn’t have O’ level result before I was arrested”.

Olusola, also a condemned criminal, wants to study political science. He has B2 in commerce; C4 in government, financial accounting and book keeping; C5 in English, biology, economics; and C6 in mathematics and civics.

He said, "I am 32 years old. I was arrested for armed robbery in Ado-Ekiti in 2010. I have learned how to become a good person. I attended primary and secondary schools in Ekiti. I want to study political science because I want to become a political adviser if I get state pardon. Since I came here I have learnt a lot of lessons; I know what is right and what is wrong. I want my governor to know that not everyone in the prison committed the offence that brought him here; many people see prisoners as those that should not be accepted back into the society. I plead with our governor in Ekiti to pardon us".

Ololade, also a condemned prisoner who wants to study community health, has B3 in chemistry and physics; C4 in biology and economics; C5 in English; and C6 in mathematics, civics, agriculture and fishery.

He said, "I am 32 years old. I was charged for murder. It was a case of cultism but because a policeman was killed, it was changed to murder. It happened in Ekiti

State in 2011. I was an undergraduate in OAU, Ife studying clinical medicine, final year to be precise. I have been totally reformed. I am pleading with Ayodele Fayose to consider us for amnesty because we have learnt our lessons; we now know what is right from what is wrong".

While explaining the feast recorded by the inmates, the Controller of Prisons, Ogun State Command, Benson Abolade Victor, said, "The core mandate of the Nigerian Prison Service is safe custody of inmates; it is only when the inmates are in safe custody that we can achieve all other mandates of the Nigeria Prison Service.

"Apart from the safe custody, we have to reform and rehabilitate them. One of the ways they can be informed is through education.

"On February 8 2017, 52 inmates graduated from Yewa Central College of Education and 42 were matriculated. So, from this, we can see that the Nigerian Prison Service is trying to ensure that inmates are transformed.

"When the Controller General of Nigerian Prisons, CGP, Ja'Faru Ahmed, gave all the Controllers of Prisons in Nigeria an order that reformation of inmates should be paramount in our minds and that inmates should leave prison better than when they came"

He pleaded with the governors of Ekiti and Ondo states to assist the five inmates who, according to him, are repentant.

“There is what we call the Prerogative of Mercy Committee. During our meetings, we do appeal to governors to help prisoners who have been of good behaviour commute their sentences or give them total freedom.

On the challenges facing the prisons in Ogun State, Victor advised government to increase funding “so that we can do better”.

Also speaking on the education policy of prisons, DCP Kolawole Olatunde, Officer In Charge of Old Abeokuta Prison, said, “There are schedules for different categories. In the Old Abeokuta Prison, we have pre and post literacy classes (primary 1-6). We also have inmates who register for secondary school. Among them were the five that just excelled in NECO”.