

## Lagos prince, ex-domestic staff sentenced to death for murder of businesswoman

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A 50-year-old Lagos Prince, Adewale Oyekan, and a former domestic servant, Lateef Balogun, (27) were on Monday sentenced to death by an Ikeja High Court for the murder of Alhaja Sikirat Ekun, a 62-year-old businesswoman and politician.

Adewale is the son of Oba Adeyinka Oyekan, Oba of Lagos, who died on March 1, 2003.

The prince hired Balogun for N6,000 to murder Ekun, according to the prosecution.

The convicts, who have been in custody for seven years, murdered Ekun by strangling her and throwing her corpse in a 1,000-foot well in her home.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports Justice Raliatu Adebisi, in a two-hour judgment, held that the prosecution proved the charges of conspiracy to commit murder and murder beyond reasonable doubt.

She said: "The circumstantial evidence was strong and cogent; the act of the defendants in killing the deceased was intentional and premeditated.

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"The court finds that the prosecution has proved beyond reasonable doubt the offences of conspiracy and murder, and the defendants are accordingly found guilty of the two-count charge.

"Section 221 of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2011, stipulates the punishment for the offence of murder as follows.

"Subject to the provisions of any other law, a person who commits the offence of murder shall be sentenced to death.

"Same is the punishment for conspiracy to commit murder as contained in Section 231 of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2011.

"The above-cited provisions of the law does not give the court any discretion whatsoever in sentencing the defendants.

"For this reason, the first and second defendants are hereby sentenced on each of counts one and two, to death by hanging. May God, the giver of life, have mercy on your souls."

NAN reports that according to the prosecution led by Mr Akin George, the convicts committed the offences at 1.00a.m. on Oct. 17, 2012, at the home of the deceased located at No. 5, Babatunde Lalega St., Omole Phase One, Lagos State.

The prosecution said that the deceased was a restaurateur who knew Oyekan due to her friendship with his late mother.

"To render assistance to the prince, Ekun employed him as the manager of her restaurant.

"Balogun, the second defendant, was a former domestic staff of Ekun, who was employed by her to take care of her elderly father," George said.

He submitted that Balogun's employment was, however, terminated following a dispute with Ekun.

"The convicts conspired, killed the deceased and threw her corpse in a well within the premises of her home, and took over her businesses and property including a bus which was sold for N170,000.

"When any inquiry was made by family and friends about her whereabouts, Oyekan informed them that she travelled to Abuja for the Ileya (Eid-el Kabir) festival. He passed this information by sending a text message from Ekun's mobile phone.

"Following worry from members of Ekun's family, and after an extensive search, her corpse was found two months later, in December 2012, by well diggers and firefighters.

"The convicts had placed a generator, a gas cylinder and other household items on the corpse to conceal it in the 1,000 feet well," he said.

The trial at the High Court began on April 14, 2015.

Five witnesses including two police officers, a nephew of the deceased, Mr Iyiola Olaniyi; and the only child of the deceased, Mrs Folashade Amurun, testified for the prosecution.

Oyekan and Balogun testified for the defence.

While testifying, the convicts both denied knowing each other, saying that they met for the first time at a police station. They also denied committing the offences.

Oyekan said that he met Ekun who was a friend of his mother at a PDP rally in 2011 after he returned from the U.S. where he obtained a degree in architecture.

He said he met the deceased thereafter at her home where she offered to assist him by employing him to manage her restaurant.

Earlier, before the sentence was passed, defence counsel, Mr O. C. Onwumerie, did not plead for mercy on behalf of his clients.

"I will be leaving sentencing to the hands of the court," he said.