



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KENYA AT MIGORI

[Coram: A. C. Mrima, J.]

CRIMINAL APPEAL NO. 5 OF 2019

CHARLES OTIENO ODONGO.....APPELLANT

-VERSUS-

REPUBLIC..... RESPONDENT

(Being an appeal arising from the conviction and sentence by Hon. R. K. Langat Senior Resident Magistrate in Rongo Magistrate's Court Criminal Case No. 32 of 2018 delivered on 16/06/2018)

JUDGMENT

1. One of the hotly contested issues in this appeal is that the trial was not fair as it infringed **Article 50(2)(g)** of the **Constitution**.
2. The appellant herein, *Charles Otieno Odongo*, was charged with two counts. The first one was *Rape* contrary to **Section 3(1)(a)(b)(3)** of the **Sexual Offences Act** No. 3 of 2006 and the other was *assault causing actual bodily harm*. The Appellant denied both counts.
3. The Appellant was subsequently tried, found guilty and convicted on both counts. He was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment on the first count and to 6 months' imprisonment on the second count. The sentences were to run consecutively.
4. Being dissatisfied with the conviction and sentence, the appellant preferred an appeal by filing a Petition of Appeal on 30/01/2019. He then instructed a Counsel to appear for him. *Messrs. Apondi & Company Advocates* came on record and filed supplementary grounds of appeal on 29/07/2019.
5. Directions were taken and the appeal was disposed of by way of written submissions. The Appellant's Counsel duly complied. She expounded on the grounds. In the end Counsel prayed that the appeal be allowed, conviction quashed and sentence set-aside.
6. **Mr. Kimanthi**, Senior Principal Prosecution Counsel, opposed the appeal and submitted that the law was amply complied with and the offence proved beyond any peradventure. Counsel prayed that the appeal be dismissed.
7. This being the appellant's first appeal, the role of this appellate Court of first instance is well settled. It was held in the case of **Okemo vs. R (1977) EALR 32** and further in the Court of Appeal case of **Mark Oiruri Mose vs. R (2013) eKLR** that this Court is duty bound to revisit the evidence tendered before the trial court afresh, evaluate it, analyse it and come to its own independent conclusion on the matter but always bearing in mind that the trial court had the advantage of observing the demeanor of the witnesses and hearing them give evidence and give allowance for that.
8. In line with the foregoing, this Court in determining this appeal is to satisfy itself that the ingredients of the offences of rape and assault were proved and as so required in law; beyond any reasonable doubt. Needless to say, I have carefully read and understood the proceedings and the judgment of the trial court as well as the record before this Court and also the submissions.
9. I would have dismissed the appeal on conviction and allowed the appeal on the sentences to the extent that the twin sentences ought to run concurrently in view of the evidence on record. However, I have previously rendered myself on **Article 50(2)(g)** of the **Constitution**. I am still of that position. This is what I stated in **Migori High Court Criminal Appeal No. 44 of 2019 N.M.T. alias Aunty vs. R** (unreported): -

11. I will start with a consideration as to whether Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution was infringed during the trial. The said provision states as follows: -

50(2) Every accused person has the right to a fair trial, which includes the right-

(g) to choose, and be represented by an advocate, and to be informed of this right promptly.

12. In light of the foregone provision a consideration of the record is necessary. The Appellant was arraigned before the trial Court at Rongo on 04/04/2019 where she was accordingly charged. The charges were presented to the Appellant in Kiswahili language where she denied them and appropriate orders were made. The prosecution informed the plea court that it had supplied the Appellant with copies of the witness statements and a copy of the charge sheet. The court further fixed the matter for hearing on 12/04/2019. Come the hearing date the matter proceeded on where the complainant, PW1, PW2 and PW4 testified. PW5 testified later.

13. When the Appellant was placed on her defence, the court duly complied with Section 211(1) of the Criminal Procedure Code. The court also explained to the Appellant that she had the right to be represented by Counsel, to proceed alone, to give sworn evidence or unsworn evidence and to call witnesses. The court also informed the Appellant of the right to remain silent. The Appellant elected to give sworn defence without calling any witnesses.

14. That being the record the question which now begs an answer is what entails the right as provided in Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution. The reading of the said provision avails that an accused person must be promptly informed of the right to choose to be represented by an Advocate. Since the Constitution does not define the word 'choose' I will make reference to the Tenth Edition of the Black's Law Dictionary on how the said word is defined. The said Dictionary does not expressly define the word 'choose or choice' but refers one to 'Freedom of Choice' (See page 294 thereof). At page 779 the Dictionary defines 'freedom' as follows: -

i. The quality, state or condition of being free or liberated esp. the right to do what one wants without being controlled or restricted by anyone.

15. The Dictionary further defines 'Freedom of Choice' as 'the liberty embodied in the exercise of one's right'. The Second Edition of the Law Dictionary has the following to say about the 'Freedom of Choice': -

Unfettered right to do what one wants when one wants as one wants, except where it infringes or prevents another from doing what that one wants, and do so on. Also excluded is doing something that would harm one's self or another.

16. To choose hence connotes options and discretion. When one is called upon to make a choice it must mean that the person has been availed with options upon which he/she may exercise his/her discretion. The right to choose an Advocate of one's choice as embodied in Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution therefore means that for an accused person to exercise that right he/she must be certainly told of the right to legal representation by an Advocate of one's choice and any other attendant information be availed accordingly to be able to make a choice on whether he/she requires any legal representation.

17. The right under Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution must be distinguished from the right under Article 50(2)(h) of the Constitution given that in many instances the rights under Article 50(2)(g) and (h) of the Constitution are dealt with contemporaneously. The right under Article 50(2)(h) of the Constitution on one hand places a duty on the State to assign an Advocate to an accused person at its own expense if substantial injustice will otherwise result. The right under Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution on the other hand deals with informing an accused person of his/her right to be represented by an Advocate of one's choice further to giving necessary information to the accused person and calling him/her to make a choice on his/her legal representation. Put differently, the right under Article 50(2)(h) of the Constitution deals with instances where the State must assign an Advocate to an accused person. Suffice to say that the right to a fair trial under Article 50 of the Constitution is among those rights that cannot be limited in any way whatsoever courtesy of Article 25 of the Constitution.

18. Courts have dealt with the need to avail such information to an accused person to enable him/her make a choice on legal representation. In Pett vs. Greyhound Racing Association (1968) 2 All ER 545 Lord Denning presented himself thus: -

It is not every man who has the ability to represent himself on his own. He cannot bring out the point in his own favour or the weakness in the other side. He may be tongue-tied, nervous, confused or wanting in intelligence. He cannot examine or cross-examine witnesses. We see it every day. A Magistrate says to a man; 'you can ask any questions you like;' whereupon the man immediately starts to make a speech. If justice is to be done, he ought to have the help of someone to speak for him and who better than a lawyer who has trained for the task.

19. In South Africa in Fraser vs. ABSA Bank Limited (66/05) (2006) ZACC 24; 2007 (3) SA 484 (CC); 2007 (3) BCLR 219 (CC) the Constitutional Court had the following to say: -

Without the recognition of the right to legal representation in section 26(6), the scheme of restraint embodied in POCA might well have been unconstitutional. However, the right embodied in section 35(3)(f) of the Constitution does not mean that an accused is entitled to the legal services of any counsel he or she chooses, regardless of his or her financial situation....

20. In Kenya, the Supreme Court in Petition No. 5 of 2015 Republic -vs- Karisa Chengo & 2 Others [2017] eKLR while dealing with various aspects of the right to a fair hearing under Article 50 of the Constitution stated as follows: -

the right to legal representation.....under the said article, is a fundamental ingredient of the right to a fair trial and is to be enjoyed pursuant to the constitutional edict without more.

21. Apart from the Constitution and the foregone judicial decisions there is The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which Kenya is a party after adopting it on 16th December 1966. Article 14(3)(d) thereof entitles an accused

person of the following rights: -

To be tried in his presence, and to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing; to be informed, if he does not have legal assistance, of this right; and to have legal assistance assigned to him, in any case where the interests of justice so require, and without payment by him in any such case if he does not have sufficient means to pay for it;

22. Having settled the need to inform an accused person of the right to legal representation under Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution, the next limb of consideration must be who is under such a duty to inform the accused person of the right. The answer seems to be in one of our legislations. The Legal Aid Act No. 6 of 2016 (hereinafter referred to as 'the Act') is an Act of Parliament to give effect to Articles 19(2), 48, 50(2)(g) and (h) of the Constitution. Section 43(1)(a) of the Act which provides one of the duties of the court as follows: -

43.(1) A court before which an unrepresented accused person is presented shall-

(a) promptly inform the accused of his or her right to legal representation;

23. Still on the said subject, a South African Court in S -vs- Daniels & Another 1983(3) 275(A) at 299 G-H, while emphasizing that the duty to inform the accused person squarely lies on the court stated that: -

... the accused's rights were explained to him, must appear from the record, in such a manner as, and with sufficient particularity, to enable a judgment to be made as to the adequacy of the explanation

24. Further, another South African Court in Mphukwa v S (CA&R 360/2004) [2012] ZAECGHC 6 (16 February 2012), made reference to the comments of Goldstone J. in S v Radebe; S v Mbonani 1988(1) SA 191 (TPD), a decision which was quoted with approval by the Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa in Ramaite -vs- The State (958/13) [2014] (26 September 2014). My Lordship Goldstone, J. stated as follows: -

...a general duty on the part of judicial officers to ensure that unrepresented accused fully understand their rights and the recognition that in the absence of such understanding a fair and just trial may not take place.

If there is a duty upon judicial officers to inform unrepresented accused of their legal rights, then I can conceive of no reason why the right to legal representation should not be one of them. Especially where the charge is a serious one which may merit a sentence which could be materially prejudicial to the accused, such an accused should be informed of the seriousness of the charge and of the possible consequences of a conviction. Again, depending upon the complexity of the charge, or of the legal rules relating thereto, and the seriousness thereof, an accused should not only be told of this right but he should be encouraged to exercise it. He should also be informed in appropriate cases that he is entitled to apply to the Legal Aid Board for assistance. A failure on the part of a judicial officer to do this, having regard to the circumstances of a particular case, may result in an unfair trial in which there may well be a complete failure of justice ...

25. In Kenya, Nyakundi, J. in Joseph Kiema Philip vs. Republic (2019) eKLR added his voice on the subject in the following manner: -

.....it is paramount that the record of the trial court should demonstrate that the accused was informed of his right to legal representation and whether or not in the case that the he cannot afford an advocate, one may be appointed at the expense of the state. It [the court record] must show that the court did take the profile of the accused person before the trial commenced.....

26. From the foregone I believe I have said enough regarding the duty of a court to inform an accused person of the right under Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution.

27. That now leads to the other question as to what point in time should the right be explained to the accused person.

28. Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution dictates that the accused person must be informed of the right to legal representation promptly. In rightly answering the question Nyakundi, J. in Joseph Kiema Philip (supra) stated as follows: -

... The earliest opportunity therefore should be at the time of plea taking; the first appearance before plea is taken or at the commencement of the proceedings, that is at the first hearings... (emphasis added).

29. I must emphasize that the accused person must be informed of this right immediately he/she appears before a court on the first appearance regardless of whether the plea would be taken at that point in time or later. Of importance is the emphasis that since the court speaks through the record then the record must be as clear as possible and ought to capture the entire conversation between the court and an accused person. A court should therefore not be in a hurry to take the plea before ascertaining that it has fully complied with Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution among others as required. Circumstances calling, a court should boldly postpone the plea-taking until satisfied that the court has fully complied with the law.

30. In this case the trial court explained the right to representation to the Appellant at defence stage. That was too far late in the day.

31. Having dealt with the various limbs of the right under Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution and in view of the status of the record as espoused hereinabove I must return the verdict that the trial court failed to comply with the dictates of Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution. The Appellant was hence not accorded a fair trial in line with Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution.

32.

33.

34. Having said so, the inevitable question that now follows is: What is the effect of the derogation of the right under Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution in the circumstances of this case?

35. There are two schools of thought on the issue. The first school fronts the position that once the derogation of the right is confirmed then the entire proceedings, judgment and sentence before the trial court are vitiated and stand null and void ab initio. The other school fronts the position that failure to inform an accused person of his/her right to legal representation does not necessarily have the effect of vitiating the proceedings in a criminal trial unless it is proved that substantial prejudice to the accused person or a miscarriage of justice was occasioned.

36. In answering the question, I will consider the wording of the Article 50(2)(g) and (h) of the Constitution. From the wording of Article 50(2)(h) the right therein is not absolute as the court must first satisfy itself that substantial injustice may result before it enforces the right. However, that is not the position under Article 50(2)(g) where the right is not qualified. Since that is what the People of Kenya wanted and so settled it in the Constitution then it remains the unwavering duty of this Court to enforce the provisions of the Constitution.

37. I therefore fully associate myself with the school which fronts the position that upon proof of derogation of the right under Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution then the trial is rendered a nullity. Qualifying the provisions of Article 50(2)(g) of the Constitution will be tantamount to amending the Constitution through a back door, an act which this Court must frown at. It may appear like the position is harsh and is likely to fan multiple applications and appeals, but I must say that unless Courts, as custodians of justice and the Rule of Law, are prepared to enforce the Constitution as it is the intentions of the People of Kenya as expressed in the Constitution will never be realized. I therefore find and hold that the entire proceedings, judgment and sentence before the trial court are a nullity and cannot stand in law.

38. The above finding now leads me to a consideration of whether the Appellant be released or be retried. My attention is drawn to several decisions of the Court of Appeal including Samuel Wahini Ngugi v. R (2012) eKLR where the Court stated as follows:

The law as regards what the Court should consider on whether or not to order retrial is now well settled. In the case of Ahmed Sumar vs. R (1964) EALR 483, the predecessor to this Court stated as concerns the issue of retrial in criminal cases as follows:

It is true that where a conviction is vitiated by a gap in the evidence or other defect for which the prosecution is to blame, the Court will not order a retrial. But where a conviction is vitiated by a mistake of the trial court for which the prosecution is not to blame it does not in our view follow that a retrial should be ordered.....In this judgment the court accepted that a retrial should not be ordered unless the Court was of the opinion that on consideration of the admissible or potentially admissible evidence a conviction might result. Each case must depend on the particular facts and circumstances of that case but an order for the retrial should only be made where the interests of justice required it and should not be ordered when it is likely to cause an injustice to an accused person

That decision was echoed in the case of Lolimo Ekimat vs. R, Criminal Appeal No. 151 of 2004 (unreported) when this Court stated as follows:

...the principle that has been accepted to courts is that each case must depend on the particular facts and circumstances of that case but an order for the retrial should only be made where interests of justice require it.

39. The error on the record was occasioned by the trial court. I have carefully considered and reviewed the evidence on record and without going into the merits thereof, a conviction is likely if the case is properly prosecuted. The offences allegedly committed are not only very serious but also beastly and the innocent, helpless and vulnerable victim will no doubt be affected for the rest of his life.

40. The Appellant was charged in April 2019. Judgment was rendered on 17/06/2019. The Appellant has by now been incarcerated for less than a year from taking plea. That period is not inordinately long. The witnesses in the case are within the complainant's family and neighborhood and as such it will not be difficult to trace them including the Clinical Officer and the Police.

41. This Court is therefore of the considered view that the ends of justice will be served by an order of retrial instead of discharging the Appellant. In view of the above unfolding events, dealing with the other grounds of appeal will not add any value. I therefore choose to end this discussion here.

42. Consequently, the appeal is allowed and the conviction quashed. The sentence is hereby set-aside and the Appellant will be released into police custody and be produced before any court competent to try him except Honourable R.K. Langat, SRM. This should be in the next 7 days of this judgment.

10. The offence was allegedly committed in late 2018. The victim hailed from [particulars withheld] village in Awendo Sub-County. The witnesses are her village mates and Government officials. I do not see the difficulty the prosecution is likely to undergo in availing the witnesses. The offence is so serious and has lasting effects on the life of the victim. Justice demands that the culprit faces appropriate sanctions. This is a case fit for a retrial. I so find.

11. I now allow the appeal, quash the convictions and set-aside the sentences on the sole ground of non-conformity with **Article 50(2)(g)** of the **Constitution**. I also order that the appellant be retried instead. The appellant be released into police custody and be produced before any Court competent to try him except **Hon. R. K. Langat, SRM**, within the next 7 days of this judgment.

Orders accordingly.

DELIVERED, DATED and SIGNED at MIGORI this 22nd day of May, 2020.

A. C. MRIMA

JUDGE

Judgment delivered in open Court and in the presence of:

Miss Apondi, Counsel for the Appellant.

Mr. Kimanthi, Senior Principal Prosecution Counsel instructed by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for the State.

Evelyne Nyauke – Court Assistant