



**REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF KENYA AT MIGORI**

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

**CRIMINAL APPEAL NO. 17 OF 2019**

**1. STEPHEN BERENGE MWERA**

**2. MWERA KOHE MARIMBA.....APPELLANTS**

**VERSUS**

**REPUBLIC..... RESPONDENT**

***(Being an appeal against the judgment, conviction and sentence of Hon. L. N. Mesa Principal Magistrate in Kehancha Magistrates Court Criminal Case No. 413 of 2018 delivered on 19/2/2019)***

**JUDGMENT**

1. **Stephen Berenge Mwera** and **Mwera Kohe Marimba** are the appellants in this appeal. They were jointly charged with *robbery with violence* and an alternative count of *handling stolen goods*.

2. The particulars of the charge of robbery with violence were as follows: -

On the 18<sup>th</sup> day of April 2018 at Rewange Village in Kuria East Sub County within Migori County, jointly with others not before court, being armed with dangerous weapons namely pangas and swords robbed **MAGEWA MAHENYE** Motor Cycle registration number **KMEG 761P** make **TVS** red in Colour valued at Kenya Shillings Ninety Four Thousand and at or immediately before or immediately after the time of such robbery used actual violence to the said **MAGEWA MAHENYE**.

3. The appellants denied the charges and were tried. Six witnesses testified in support of the prosecution's case. **PW1** was the owner of the motor cycle registration number **KMEG 761P** make **TVS**. A Clinical Officer stationed at Kegonga Sub-County Hospital testified as **PW2**. **PW3** was the victim. **PW4** was another Clinical Officer. He was from Ntimaru Sub-County Hospital. **PW5** was a Tanzanian Detective. He was stationed at Nyamuhenga Police Station in Tarime in Tanzania. The Investigating Officer testified as **PW6**. He was **No. 232903 CIP. Capis Otieno**. He was the DCIO Kuria East Sub-County of Migori County. For the purposes of this appeal I will refer to the witnesses in the sequence in which they testified.

4. At the close of the prosecution's case the appellants were placed on their defences. They both gave unsworn defences. They did not call any witness.

5. By a judgment rendered on 22/02/2019 the appellants were found guilty of robbery with violence and accordingly convicted. Both were sentenced to suffer death.

6. Dissatisfied with the convictions and sentences the appellants timeously lodged a joint appeal. They alleged that the offence was not proved and that **Article 50(2)(g)** of the **Constitution** was not adhered to. They prayed that the appeal be allowed.

7. Directions were taken and the appeal was disposed of by way of written submissions. The appellants expounded on the grounds.

8. The State partly opposed the appeal. Whereas it did not support the conviction and sentence on the offence of robbery with violence, the prosecution submitted that the offence of handling stolen property was properly founded. It was prayed that the appellants be convicted on that offence and be sentenced accordingly.

9. This being a first appeal, the role of this appellate Court of first instance is well settled. It was held in the case of **Okeno vs. Republic (1977) EALR 32** and further in the Court of Appeal case of **Mark Oiruri Mose vs. Republic (2013) eKLR** that this Court is duty bound to revisit the evidence tendered before the trial court afresh, evaluate it, analyze 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.

10. I will first deal with the issue as to whether **Article 50(2)(g)** of the **Constitution** was contravened in this matter. I have previously rendered myself on the issue. Since I am still of that position, I will reproduce 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 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 Nguji 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 each 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.*

11. The trial, conviction and sentence are therefore a nullity. The conviction is hereby quashed and the death sentence set-aside.

12. I will now deal with the issue as to whether the appellants be retried or be released. I also set out the law on retrial in **N.M.T. alias Aunty vs. R** case (supra). I have gone through the evidence on record. I agree with the prosecution that the offence of robbery with violence was not proved. The trial court discussed the doctrine of recent possession. It correctly captured the legal principles as discussed by the Court of Appeal in **Isaac Ng'ang'a Kahiga alias Peter Ng'ang'a Kahiga vs. Republic, Criminal Appeal No. 272 of 2005 (UR)**.

13. As emphasized, for the doctrine to be applicable possession must be proved. It must be proved that the property was found with the suspect(s). The property in this case was the motor cycle. There is no doubt PW3 was robbed of the motor cycle. It is also clear in evidence that no witness identified the assailants. It is further not in doubt that the motor cycle was found the following day in Tarime in Tanzania.

14. The evidence on the recovery of the motor cycle was led by PW5. He partly stated as follows: -

**I recall on 19.4.2018. at around noon. I was with several officers in the DCI office at Nyamahaga at Nyamahege Police Station. Our in-charge came to our office and told us that there was an incident of two thieves who had been arrested at Itirio village. The irate villagers were in the process of injuring the thieves. He directed us to enter the armory and take weapons. .... We rushed to the village in Itirio where we found several villagers .... Found two young men tied with ropes on both their hands and legs. Besides them they had a motor cycle with numbers of the neighbouring country KMEG 761G. Besides them were two sacks of maize.**

**..... Since we were few, we called the village elder for assistance. He informed us that the owner of the stolen motor cycle was on his way from Kenya. We decided to take the suspects and the two sacks of maize and the motor cycle into the police vehicle No. PT1010 and took them to the police station in the company of the village elder.**

15. When examined by the first appellant, PW5 repeatedly stated that he found the motor cycle at the scene where the appellants were. PW5 further stated that the appellants were arrested for theft of maize.

16. The evidence of PW5 did not prove that the appellants were in possession of the motor cycle. PW5 only found the appellants tied with ropes in a certain home. He also saw the motor cycle thereat. There was no evidence that was led to reveal how the motor cycle found its way to the scene and how it was in possession of the appellants. After all, the appellants were tied and were on the ground. There were as well many villagers at the scene.

17. Having failed to prove the cardinal ingredient of the doctrine of recent possession, the doctrine could not therefore be relied upon to find a conviction. The evidence did not support the offence of robbery with violence.

18. As to whether the offence of handling stolen property was proved, as proposed by the prosecution, I must state that the offence also rested on the issue of possession. Without proof of possession the offence cannot be proved.

19. I am of the considered view that the evidence on record is unlikely to prove any of the two offences the appellants faced. I therefore do not find it prudent to order a retrial in this case.

20. The upshot is that the appellants are set at liberty forthwith unless otherwise lawfully held.

Orders accordingly.

**DELIVERED, DATED and SIGNED at MIGORI this 20<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2020.**

**A. C. MRIMA**

**JUDGE**

**Judgment delivered in open Court and in the presence of:**

**Stephen Berenge Mwera and Mwera Kohe Marimba, the Appellants in person.**

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

**Evelyne Nyauke** – Court Assistant