



SANT'EGIDIO

SANT'EGIDIO: A Call for Justice and Mercy: The Case of the Young Man Sentenced to Death in Nigeria

Death Sentence for Stealing Fowl:

Recently, the media has focused attention on the case of a young man named Olowookere, who received a death sentence for stealing a fowl. This case has raised important discussions regarding the justice system, especially when considered alongside the prevalence of white-collar crimes and a culture of impunity. Olowookere, who was just 17 at the time of his arrest in November 2010, was convicted by an Osun State High Court on December 17, 2014, for conspiracy to commit armed robbery, robbery, and theft.

As members of the Sant'Egidio Community, we are deeply grieved and moved by the incident. While we do not encourage criminality in any form, we are not unmindful of the tenets of mercy and restorative justice. The Community of Sant'Egidio, therefore, welcomes the news of the pardon granted to Olowookere and his co-convict by the Osun State Governor, an act that brings relief to a case that has deeply moved the conscience of our nation.

This incident has vividly highlighted the persistent issues plaguing the Nigerian criminal justice system, particularly concerning death penalty and awaiting trials. It is utterly absurd and unacceptable that Olowookere endured more than 14 years in prison, facing the constant threat of death for stealing a chicken. This case demands a critical reassessment of our commitment to the fundamental values of life, justice, and human dignity, which are central to our principles and mission. We must take a stand and ensure that these values are upheld.

No to the Death Penalty:

We believe that the death penalty is a grave violation of human dignity and an ineffective response to crime. It denies the possibility of repentance and redemption while perpetuating a cycle of violence. Every life is sacred, regardless of the mistakes made. Every person, including the worst criminals, deserves an opportunity for reform and restoration, not a sentence of irreversible punishment. We urge the authorities especially the legislatures to pursue judicial reforms and promulgate laws that explore alternative paths to justice that heal rather than destroy.

Globally, many nations are adopting measures to abolish the death penalty, due to its effectiveness and result-driven approach. Recently, Zimbabwe has made significant strides

by joining the global movement to eliminate this disreputable concept of punishment. In the light of this development, the Nigerian Government needs to reconsider its position on this critical issue, so that more Olowookeres' lives can be saved from the clutches of unwarranted death.

A Call for Judicial Reform:

The case of Olowookere highlights the urgent need for judicial reforms in Nigeria. The justice system must prioritize fairness, proportionality, and rehabilitation. Sentences must fit the crime, considering not just the offence but the social and economic factors that drive individuals to acts of desperation. Poverty and inequality cannot be criminalized; instead,

they must be addressed with compassion and systemic change.

The Sant'Egidio Community calls on all stakeholders - government officials, civil societies, religious leaders, and citizens - to work together to strengthen Nigeria's justice system. Let us advocate for alternatives to the death penalty, the humane treatment of offenders, and a justice system that seeks rehabilitation rather than retribution.

We call on the government, civil society, and all stakeholders to:

1. Strive to abolish the death penalty and replace it with humane alternatives focused on rehabilitation.
2. Implement reforms to ensure fair and proportional sentencing, especially for minors.
3. Address systemic issues such as poverty and inequality that contribute to crime.
4. Strengthen legal aid services to ensure that the poor and marginalized receive fair representation in court and timely justice.
5. Enhance and empower the various security agencies within the nation to improve their investigative capabilities.

A Commitment to Life and Mercy:

Olowookere's case is a powerful testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of advocacy. His story reminds us that no life is beyond redemption and that justice must always be accompanied by mercy. While the pardon granted to Olowookere is a step in the right direction, it exposes the urgent need for judicial reforms in Nigeria, especially regarding the sentencing of minors, the proportionality of sentences, and the conditions of incarceration. Overcrowded prisons, prolonged pretrial detentions, and the criminalization of poverty reflect a system that often punishes the vulnerable while failing to address the societal inequalities that lead to crime. As a community, we will continue to support those in need,

advocate for systemic change, and work toward a Nigeria where every person's dignity is upheld.

Our Commitment to Peace and Solidarity:

In moments of crisis, let us remember the words of Christ: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). We pledge our support to the oppressed and those seeking justice, especially those unjustly arrested or detained and those awaiting trials in various correctional facilities in Nigeria. At Sant'Egidio, we stand firmly alongside them in prayer and advocacy, drawing inspiration from the fourth Beatitude, which reminds us that those who deeply long for justice and moral uprightness will ultimately find their fulfillment in God's promises (Matthew 5:6). Together, we can build a society that values life, upholds justice, and leaves no one behind.

Let this case be a turning point - a call to awaken the conscience of our nation to choose life over death, mercy over vengeance, justice over retribution, and peace over violence.

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