Group demands deportation of Nigerian pastor acquitted of rape

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Calls for the deportation of South Africa-based Nigerian televangelist, Timothy Omotoso, have intensified following his acquittal on rape charges by the Gqeberha High Court on Wednesday.  
  
Omotoso, along with his co-accused, Lusanda Sulani and Zukiswa Sitho, was released after spending eight years in detention.  
  
According to IOL, a South African news outlet, the country’s National Prosecuting Authority is considering all possible options to ensure justice for the complainants.  
  
The NPA spokesperson, Luxolo Tyali, explained that the prolonged legal proceedings had affected witness participation.  
  
“The delays caused some witnesses to no longer want to proceed with giving evidence, as they indicated they have since moved on with their lives and are not interested in reliving their experiences in court,” Tyali stated.  
  
Reports also suggest that Omotoso will be deported to Nigeria following his acquittal, although no official confirmation has been provided.  
  
Meanwhile, ActionSA, a political organisation founded by former Johannesburg Mayor, Herman Mashaba, has called for Omotoso’s immediate removal from South Africa.  
  
In a statement obtained by PUNCH Metro, the group condemned individuals who exploit faith for personal gain.  
  
“ActionSA firmly opposes the infiltration of South Africa by dubious entrepreneurs and self-proclaimed ‘biblepreneurs’ who prey on hard-working and unsuspecting citizens. These individuals exploit faith and desperation, robbing people of their innocence and hard-earned money,” the statement read.  
  
While acknowledging the contributions of legally residing foreign nationals, the group insisted that Omotoso had no place in the country.  
  
“Our concern lies with those who, like Timothy Omotoso, have entered our country and swiftly become entangled in criminal activities,” the statement continued.  
  
“Omotoso, in particular, has been accused of heinous crimes, including human trafficking, sexual assault, and racketeering involving vulnerable women and underage children.”  
  
Describing his acquittal as “a devastating blow to victims and a glaring indictment of our immigration services, the criminal justice system, and the National Prosecuting Authority’s ongoing failure to deliver justice”, ActionSA emphasised the need for accountability.  
  
The organisation further demanded that Omotoso and his associates be added to the national sex offenders’ register and barred from any roles that grant them access to vulnerable individuals.  
  
“Furthermore, we call on immigration authorities to revoke Omotoso’s residency status and immediately deport him to Nigeria. South Africa cannot be a refuge for those who exploit and harm its people,” the statement concluded.  
  
The 66-year-old senior pastor of Jesus Dominion International Church in South Africa, Omotoso, faced allegations of raping and trafficking young women, including members of the gospel group, Grace Galaxy and school-aged girls.  
  
Arrested in 2017, Omotoso was charged with multiple offences, including sexual assault and human trafficking.  
  
His church, located in the coastal city of Port Elizabeth, was eventually shut down after angry crowds gathered around the building in protest.  
  
Unverified reports also suggested that one of the women who testified against him had received death threats from unknown individuals before the trial.  
  
Omotoso’s ministry was among the many rapidly expanding evangelical churches in South Africa, known for offering promises of miracles and prophecies.