Rape: S’African agencies slam judge for acquitting Nigerian pastor

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Some South African government agencies have condemned the acquittal of a Nigerian televangelist, Timothy Omotoso, after spending eight years in detention for rape charges.  
  
The South Africa-based Nigerian pastor alongside his co-defendants, Lusanda Sulani and Zukiswa Sitho, was discharged and acquitted of rape, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking by Gqeberha High Court on Wednesday.  
  
Omotoso had been in jail since 2017 awaiting trial, following his arrest at the Chief Dawid Stuurman International Airport.  
  
Delivering the verdict, the presiding judge, Irma Schoeman said Omotoso, the senior pastor of Jesus Dominion International, situated in Durban, was not guilty because his prosecutors had mishandled the case.  
  
Also, the South Africa’s National Prosecuting Authority said, “former prosecutors in the case acted improperly and the accused were not sufficiently cross-examined by the state.”  
  
But notable agencies, including the South Africa’s Justice Committee and the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, slammed the judge for her verdict.  
  
According to South African media, the country’s Justice Department, while reacting on Thursday, slammed Schoeman and the NPA, describing Omotoso’s acquittal as an “assault on the fight against gender-based violence.”  
  
The committee, chaired by Xola Nqola, said the sexagenarian’s freedom “is totally unacceptable”, adding that, “we need the National Prosecuting Authority to explain the weaknesses in the team and the case they presented.”  
  
Similarly, the Department of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities, in a statement, criticised the ruling, adding that it had only created doubt in South Africa’s judicial system.  
  
“The acquittal of Omotoso represents a judicial turning point, one that risks undermining the faith that survivors have in the legal system,” the department stated. “Many women came forward bravely to testify about their horrific experiences, but the ruling will likely compound the emotional toll they have already endured.”  
  
“This case highlights the complexity of gender-based violence and femicide, both of which require urgent, comprehensive, and coordinated action,” the statement continued.  
  
It stated, “The fight against GBV is far from over, and while we respect the outcome of the case, it cannot deter us from our mission to create a safe and just society for women, youth, and persons with disabilities.”  
  
The department concluded that it would not be deterred by this ruling, but, “Instead, it will only strengthen our resolve to work tirelessly for a South Africa that is safe, just, and empowering for all.”  
  
Meanwhile, a political organisation in South Africa, ActionSA, had called for the deportation of the Nigerian cleric following his acquittal.