S’Africa-based Nigerian pastor acquitted of rape after eight years

Date: 2025-04-02

Source: https://punchng.com/safrica-based-nigerian-pastor-acquitted-of-rape-after-eight-years/

Nigerian televangelist, Pastor Timothy Omotoso, has been discharged and acquitted of rape and human trafficking charges that had been ongoing since 2017.  
  
The 66-year-old senior pastor of Jesus Dominion International Church in South Africa was accused of raping and trafficking young women, including members of the gospel group, Grace Galaxy and school-aged girls.  
  
According to The South African, a South Africa-based publication, Pastor Omotoso was acquitted of all charges by the Gqeberha High Court.  
  
The televangelist had been in custody since his initial arrest in 2017 on multiple charges, including sexual assault and human trafficking.  
  
However, on Wednesday, the court found him not guilty, leading to his release.  
  
The report read, “Omotoso and his two co-accused, Lusanda Sulani and Zukiswa Sitho, returned to the dock where Judge Irma Schoeman handed down the judgement.  
  
“He was cleared of rape and human trafficking by Judge Schoeman. Omotoso faced 63 charges with his co-accused, but the court found the evidence presented against them insufficient.”  
  
Co-accused suspects, Sulani and Sitho, were alleged to have played a key role in recruiting young women into the church, where they were reportedly subjected to sexual abuse by Omotoso.  
  
However, on Wednesday, the court ruled, “The accused are found not guilty and are discharged on all charges.”  
  
The three accused had maintained their innocence throughout the trial, and after eight years in prison, Omotoso is now a free man.  
  
Omotoso was first arrested in 2017 on multiple charges, including sexual assault, human trafficking, and racketeering.  
  
The trial faced numerous delays over the years due to factors such as changes in legal representation and judicial recusals.  
  
At one point, his lawyers sought to have the case dismissed.  
  
“Handing down her judgement on Wednesday, Judge Schoeman said the State failed in their attempt to prove these allegations against Omotoso beyond reasonable doubt.  
  
“She also bemoaned the cross-examination of the accused as of poor quality, and therefore, the three accused were found not guilty.  
  
“Upon digesting the ruling, two accused, led by Omotoso, went down on their knees inside the courtroom to pray,” the report partly read.  
  
Omotoso’s acquittal comes amid ongoing concerns over South Africa’s high rates of sexual violence, with police reports indicating 42,500 rapes in 2023-24.  
  
His church, located in the coastal city of Port Elizabeth, was forced to shut down after angry crowds surrounded the building.  
  
Unconfirmed reports also suggested that one of the women who testified against the pastor had received death threats from unknown individuals before the trial.  
  
Omotoso’s ministry was considered one of the many growing evangelical churches in South Africa, known for promising miracles and prophecies.  
  
According to a report by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 2018, the church also gained attention for its videos featuring uniformed young female singers, some of whom had appeared on the Idols South African television contest.