

I was stripped naked and beaten, says woman of treatment by police

Wangari says she was falsely accused by Flying Squad officers who held her in custody, undressed and beat her, and inserted a soda bottle into her private parts while pinning her down

BY KAMAU MUTHONI

Liza Wangari Mwangi is living testimony of the horror law enforcers can inflict, and the tiring quest for justice even after favourable court awards.

It is now 13 years since the ugly incident at the hands of Flying Squad officers in Kerugoya, Kirinyaga County.

The nightmare has never ended for the mother of one, now in her late 30s, who was tortured by eight police officers.

She has never received a Sh10 million court award for the traumatic ordeal she experienced.

The pay has been an elusive course between her and the Office of the Solicitor General since the judgement entered against the Government was passed by the Embu High Court.

On June 27, 2001, at about 11am, Wangari was at a bus station called Piai waiting to board a matatu when a personal vehicle pulled up and the occupants called out to her. She knew one of them who was a policewoman.

They ordered her to get in and drove her to Karatina Police Station where they handed her to eight officers from the Flying Squad; her nightmare that lasted 13 days had just begun.

The officers questioned her about her involvement with one Bernard Kibang'a, a man they were looking for over claims of counterfeit money.

ACTS OF TERROR

A teary Wangari narrated how she was locked up before the officers unleashed acts of terror that no human mind can fathom.

In the hearing that the Attorney General did not respond to or enter appearance to defend, the court heard that the officers stripped her naked, bludgeoned her and, worst of all, inserted a soda bottle into her private parts.

This, she told the court, was just a bit of the painful ordeal that left her with an eternal scar and a deep fear of the men entrusted to uphold the law.

"They frog-marched me and then beat me on my back while I lay spreadeagled on the floor completely naked. A male police officer forced a 300ml Coca Cola bottle into my private parts while others held my

INHUMAN ACTS BY OFFICERS

- The officers striped her naked, bludgeoned her and, worst of all, inserted a soda bottle into her private parts
- She was arrested again and this time, was accused of conning a businesswoman of beans, which turned out to be maize and then rice, and later a business partnership she failed to honour
- She was eventually taken to court where she was charged with conning a woman trader of Sh60,000

legs apart," the court heard.

She complained about the officer who she says had threatened to kill her if she told anyone what they had done.

Wangari sought help from the International Medico Unit (IMLU), which directed her to the Kenya National Human Rights Commission. The agency wrote to the PPO demanding that the officer be brought to book. This did not happen.

She was arrested again and this time, she was accused of conning a businesswoman of beans, which turned out to be maize and then rice, and later a business partnership she failed to honour.

Pleas to have her released fell on deaf ears and eventually she was taken to court where she was charged with conning a woman trader of Sh60,000. She spent an entire year in prison.

CASE DISMISSED

"I did not have a rice store and I have never owned one. They implicated me and the person who appeared as the witness was a stranger to me. I had already told the Magistrate's Court that I had a case with the police over torture," said Wangari as tears flowed down her cheeks.

At the time of trial, she complained before the court, which ordered her taken to hospital for a medical check-up and treatment. Doctors indicated she had suffered physical injuries as well as mental complications.

According to the report, Wangari complained of lower abdominal pain during her menses, which lasted long and were very painful.

In another report, she was said to have complained of nightmares related to police torture.

But the Magistrate's Court sentenced her to a year in prison or a Sh30,000 fine, which she could not raise, so she ended up doing time in King'ong'o Prison.

Wangari was to later learn that she had been compensated while in jail. She told The Standard that her life has been dark especially as the family's breadwinner despite being in poor health due to injuries she sustained in police custody.

"I live under a lot of stress. I have a family that depends on me and you see I cannot be of that much help. I have a tube in a part of my stomach and also stitches due to surgery I had to remove the section they damaged when they beat me," she said, adding that she cannot bend for more than two hours because of bleeding.

In her judgement, Justice W Karanja described the conduct by police as not just



A tearful Liza Wangari during an interview in which she said she is seeking compensation after she was tortured by police. [PHOTOS: GEORGE NJUNGE AND FILE/STANDARD]



Attorney General Githu Muigai. Compensation claims were to be transferred to his office.



Interior Principal Secretary Mutea Iringo sought Sh36 million for compensation that included Liza Wangari's payout.

wrong but abnormal, crude and even demonic.

"Even the fact that male police officers could strip a woman suspect naked, flog her on the back and gleefully insert a bottle in her private parts is in itself not just an apex of vulgarity, but an obnoxious act that goes against all rules of common decency.

"It was an outrageous act that calls for unreserved condemnation by all right minded persons," the judge said.

Even as she talked to us, Wangari kept breaking down while narrating her ordeal, an indication that she is far from recovery.

In a letter seen by The Standard, Interior Permanent Secretary Mutea Iringo had sought Sh36 million to settle legal

compensation claims and this was to be transferred to the AG's office. The monies included Wangari's payout.

But she said the office has been taking her round in circles, which prompted the Ombudsman to file a judicial review case against the State.

"I have been in hospital and had to ask people to support me. When I'm in pain I have to take painkillers because I cannot afford what the doctor directs me to take," she says.

The case before the High Court continues this week.

"When will I get justice and finally rest without fear and stress?" posed a distraught Wangari.

“A male police officer forced a 300ml Coca Cola bottle into my private parts while others held my legs apart.”