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COPE OUTRAGED AT ACQUITTAL OF OMOTOSO AND CO-ACCUSED ON RAPE CHARGES

The Congress of the People (COPE) is deeply disappointed by the shocking acquittal of Timothy Omotoso, Lusanda Solani and Zikiswa Sitho on charges, including human trafficking, rape and sexual assault.

This ruling is not only a miscarriage of justice but also a failure of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and the South African justice system as a whole.

The outcome of this trial exposes a failing justice system, marked by incompetence and a failure to protect the most vulnerable members of our society. The NPA's handling of this case highlights the failures of prosecutors who have, time and again, mishandled crucial cases. This ruling is a betrayal of every woman and child who has come forward to report crime.

Omotoso spent eight years on trial, only to be acquitted, not due to any shortcomings on the part of the accused, but because of the incompetence of the NPA, who, according to the judge, failed to effectively cross-examine the defence. Victims like Cheryl Zondi, who gave chilling testimony, were forced to relive their traumatic experiences.

The number of charges against Omotoso dropped from 63 due to a loss of confidence in the justice system. Many witnesses abandoned their cases, and the process became a form of harm to the survivors, who were forced to face the very system that should have been protecting them.

Sexual violence remains one of the most pervasive crimes in South Africa, where one woman is raped every 12 minutes. One in three women in South Africa will experience sexual or physical violence in their lifetime. The acquittal of Omotoso and his co-accused is not just a failure of the legal system. It is a national shame. The NPA owes the public, especially victims of sexual violence, an explanation.

COPE demands an answer to the critical question: How will the NPA restore trust among rape victims in a system that has so clearly failed them? The legal process has been weaponised against the very people it is meant to protect, and this cannot be allowed to continue.

COPE further calls for immediate accountability from the NPA and urgent reforms to ensure that justice is delivered for survivors of sexual violence. The women and children of this nation deserve better, and it is high time the justice system reflects this.

The decision to deport Omotoso to Nigeria, however, may be legally precarious. The NPA could face legal impediments getting him extradited if the court's decision is successfully appealed. This situation could be similar to our current extradition challenges with Shepherd Bushiri and his wife, who are facing criminal charges but are in Malawi, making it difficult for them to return to South Africa to stand trial.

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