

Beggar to stand trial in High Court over child trafficking

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BY JULIET KIGONGO

A father with speech and hearing impairments, who allegedly used his three-year-old daughter as bait to solicit sympathy from passers-by on the streets of Kampala, has been committed to the High Court to stand trial on charges of child trafficking.

Mr Faruk Malingumu, 36, a resident of Katwe in Kampala District, is accused of exploiting his daughter, Jamila, to solicit money from the public. If convicted of the offence of trafficking in persons, he faces a maximum sentence of death by hanging.

According to the prosecution, Mr Malingumu had been begging around Kitgum House for several months, moving with the toddler perched on his shoulders while holding a placard asking for transport back to Soroti.

His activities came to the attention of police after a senior officer received a photo on WhatsApp, prompting a chain of events that culminated in his arrest on November 7, 2024.

The indictment signed by the Director of Public Prosecutions states that on November 7, 2024, on Kampala Road, Mr Malingumu received, harboured, or transported the three-year-old girl by means of abuse of power or a position

of vulnerability for purposes of financial exploitation.

"The first report was made by SSP Carolyn Kushemererwa, who received the photo on November 4, 2024. The picture showed Mr Malingumu carrying the juvenile with a handwritten placard appealing for assistance. She traced the source of the image and established that the man had been stationed near Kitgum House for months, routinely begging with the child," the court documents read in part.

The documents further state that Kushemererwa then forwarded the photo to SP Grace Nampijja, who, in turn, reported the matter to the officer-in-charge of Kampala Road Police Post. Acting on the report, AIP Wangwe arrested the suspect at the traffic lights on Entebbe Road.

Upon his arrest, Mr Malingumu was found with Shs4,800, believed to have been collected from street begging, and which has since been exhibited as evidence.

He was subsequently taken to Kampala Central Police Station, where, due to his speech impairment, he recorded a statement with the assistance of a sign language expert. He confirmed that he had been arrested with the child in town.

Police also interviewed his older



Mr. Faruk Malingumu, in the dock at Buganda Road Chief Magistrate's Court on charges of child trafficking yesterday. PHOTO/JULIET KIGONGO

daughter, Merisha, who reportedly told investigators that the accused often left the rest of the children at home and moved only with the youngest to the streets to beg for money.

Medical examinations presented by the prosecution indicate that on November 12, 2024, the accused was examined at CPS Kampala HCII and found to be mentally sane, but with speech impairment. The three-year-old victim was also examined and found to be mentally sound.

The prosecution intends to rely on several exhibits at trial, including the placard, photographs of the accused with the child, medical forms, and the cash found on him at the time of arrest.

Alongside the indictment, the DPP's office has also acknowledged receipt of a handwritten letter from Luzira Upper Prison authored by Mr Malingumu on April 10, in which he appeals for leniency.

However, in his letter to the DPP, Mr Malingumu states that he was arrested with three of his biological children and that the charge of aggravated trafficking in children resulted from a misunderstanding due to his inability to verbally communicate with officers.

"I could not explain myself because of my deafness and officers misinterpreted the situation. I was arraigned before Buganda Road Chief Magistrate's Court and later remanded to Luzira Upper Prison," the letter reads in part.

He further told the DPP that during a visit on April 7, 2024, his mother informed him that she did not know the whereabouts of the children with whom he had been arrested.

In his appeal, he described himself as the sole provider for two women, one of them pregnant, and 11 biological children.

He pleaded with the DPP to consider his release so he could return home and take care of his family.

The trial chief magistrate, Ronald Kayizzi, committed him to the High Court for trial at the next court's convenient date.