

Higher Court Dismisses Appealed Life Sentence for Prison Warder on 5 kg Ivory Conviction

The High Court of Kibera (Nairobi) on April 8th, 2025, dismissed the appeal of Lawrence Kinoti who, the previous November, had been sentenced to life imprisonment with a second prison warder, Paul Muranu Mwangi. Judge Diana Kavedza-Mochache found “the appeal to be lacking in merit and is dismissed in its entirety”.

Kinoti and Mwangi had been arrested at the Rio Hotel in Nairobi West on August 11th, 2015 after KWS investigators had received intelligence that the two and one other were selling ivory. A third prison warder, Kipkoech Cheruiyot escaped but was arrested a few days later. KWS recovered 5 pieces of ivory weighing 5 kg.

The prosecution, that took 7 1/2 years to hear six witnesses, had the hallmarks of a compromised case based on duration alone. When it took nine sittings over seven months for Principal Magistrate M. Maroro to deliver her verdict, the possibility of compromise appeared increased.

On October 24th, 2024, with SEEJ-AFRICA in attendance, PM Maroro found the first two guilty and the third not guilty, citing insufficient evidence to secure a conviction. Two weeks later, the two accused were sentenced to a 1 million shilling fine or in default five years imprisonment for possession of wildlife trophies and on count two, Dealing in Wildlife trophies, a 20 million shilling fine or in default life imprisonment.

Lady Justice Kavedza-Mochache is no stranger to wildlife cases. Her name first became known in 2016 when, as a Principal Magistrate, she convicted Feisal Mohamed Ali of dealing in 2152 kg of ivory, sentencing him to a 20 million shilling fine (approx USD \$200,000 then) and 20 years in prison. His four accomplices were acquitted in a trial marred with controversy and corruption, including missing evidence, a suspended magistrate, and perjured police testimony.