

THE UNTOLD STORY OF CAPT. HOSA OKUNBO

THE UNVARNISHED TRUTH

BY OSA DIRECTOR

Journalism is an art, a craft that is intoxicating and alluring, especially for the serious minded. I pride myself as one. Therefore, when a prominent contact and source reached out to me in June 2008 with the intention of giving me a world exclusive story on the secret life and source of wealth of Capt. Hosa Okunbo, a prominent Benin-based businessman, I was elated.

That was going to be a story! A big one, indeed a very big one, so, I thought. The contact noted that the Benin-based businessman who was on the ascendancy as one of the richest men in the South-South region then, was into drugs trafficking.

In short, he was labelled a drug baron. What an exclusive story to pursue. I needed all the investigative skills and tact to eviscerate and uncover the alleged dark secrets of Capt. Hosa.

I was informed he had been a guest of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, (NDLEA), in the past for trafficking in drugs! What a lead, I imagined!

At INSIDERWEEKLY where I was Editor-In-Chief/Chief Executive, we had a very committed team of crack reporters and an editorial board consisting of men and women with great investigative skills, coupled with vast network of contacts in the various security agencies. We deployed them to work under my supervision.

But as the investigations, which were thorough and committal in our opinion went on, it became obvious that we were headed to a *cul-de-sac*, in terms of expectations.

The expectation was to finally nail Capt. Hosa and expose the alleged dark secrets and illicit trade in drugs. So we never gave up. Did we succeed in establishing his culpability in drugs crime?

The first shocker was when we approached the man, Capt. Hosa after conducting due diligence, ferreting information and documents at our disposal. His confidence was verging on arrogance as regards his innocence. He refused to grant an interview on the subject matter, saying it was a non-issue. Based on the documents we confronted him with, he referred us to his lawyer who handled the case with the NDLEA in 1995. He was brimming with confidence that we would not find anything untoward against him.

When INSIDERWEEKLY team met his



Capt. Hosa

lawyer, Morayo Lebi, he said that Capt. Hosa was arrested by the then Major General Musa Bamaiyi-led NDLEA based on an anonymous petition. Lebi averred that the petition was an attempt by his client's envious business associates to frame him up.

Consequently, Capt. Hosa was arrested by the NDLEA on February 18, 1995. He was said to have been thoroughly interrogated and investigated. But when no trail of evidence was found connecting him with drugs trafficking, he was released a few weeks later on March 7, 1995.

“Apparently, the petitioners were ready to do him in; so they pressed their buttons to ensure my client was re-arrested and kept in custody in perpetuity until we went to court to seek his release, or trial, if any evidence existed for such,” Lebi disclosed.

In deference to the principles of fair hearing and balanced reporting, we also made contact with the NDLEA to dig up some more facts, and hear their own side of the story.

The NDLEA Officer, Segun Roland, who as a member of the Agency's Task Force and was assigned personally by the chairman, Bamaiyi to handle the case stated his findings willingly and openly to us.

When Capt. Hosa was re-arrested on April 4, 1995, and held captive for almost eight months, Roland disclosed that they

did all they could but could not establish a prima facie case against him.

Therefore, the young entrepreneur and former aviation pilot was discharged and acquitted by the Military Tribunal.

Honorable Justice Tijanni Abdullahi delivering judgment in the Charge No MOT/2/163/95 said, “The prosecution has not made out a prima facie case against the accused person that would warrant the Tribunal to ask him to defend himself.”

He therefore, discharged and acquitted Capt. Hosa under rule 6(3) of the miscellaneous offence, Tribunal Rules of Procedure on all the three counts.

Shockingly, NDLEA officer Roland told us that he was consequently punished by the NDLEA chairman, Bamaiyi for not generating evidence to robe in the former pilot-turned businessman.

“But I have no regrets, as I could not bring myself to jail an innocent man,” Roland told us then.

In spite of our findings, having covered all the necessary angles, we were determined to go further in attempting to establish any connection between Capt. Hosa and drugs trafficking.

Hence, apart from evidence obtained from his lawyers, NDLEA and Tribunal record, we probed deeper into his vast business activities that our capacity and reach as journalists could avail us of, we perused tonnes of documents, following several leads.

However, the deeper we probed the more we ran into a dead end in establishing a nexus between Capt. Hosa and drugs trafficking.

Our sincere and objective conclusion based on our investigations and findings was that the man had no thread of evidential proof to link up him with drug peddling!

As journalists, who are committed to the principles of openness, accountability and fairness, we had no choice than to report what we found, in order to educate, enlighten and perhaps entertain the numerous readers, all in submission to the cardinal principles and ethics of journalism. Our story was published in **INSIDERWEEKLY, Edition No. 2, dated January 26, 2009 on Pages 30 and 31, with the headline: Okunbo: The Untold Story.**

Osa, a journalist and lawyer, was Editor-In-Chief/CEO of INSIDERWEEKLY is based in Lagos.

INSIDE NIGERIA

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OKUNBO: THE UNTOLD STORY

Captain Idahosa Okunbor, a prominent businessman clears the air surrounding his immense wealth and dismisses allegations of shady deals leveled against him as handiwork of detractors and idle mind

By Inuwa Ibrahim

He is self effacing, easily lost in a crowd. But his giant strides in the world of business and bent for quiet philanthropy stands him out as a man of purpose, with a mission to help the needy, and leave a mark on the sands of time.

Apart from his numerous scholarships award to indigent students, Hosa as he is popularly called by friends and admirers gained mileage and the love of the downtrodden in Edo State when he was the only businessman in the state who identified with market women who eked a living from Oba market, Benin City when the popularly market mysteriously went up in flames. Properties and goods worth several millions of naira were lost and the women were rendered idle and jobless. However, Hosa's donation of N30 million to the market women went a long way to help rebuild their businesses. Ever since, he had literally remained a constant star in the heart of the people, especially the needy.

His philanthropy also gravitated him towards politics. He is a renown young turk, ebbing away the strangle hold of the old foxes and godfathers of Edo State Politics.

Unfortunately, politics is a blood sport, especially in this part of the world. Therefore, efforts were accelerated to nail Hosa and terminate his rising profile.

Rumours began to circulate and questions raised about the source of Hosa stupendous wealth. One of such rumours was that the retired air plane pilot is into drug trafficking as a baron. And to strengthen such argument, reference was made to the fact that Hosa was once detained by the now deceased Major General Musa Bamaiyi, when he was chairman of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, (NDLEA). That was in 1995.

INSIDERWEEKLY learned Hosa was arrested on February 18, 1995 but released on March 7, 1995 after the Drug Agency interrogated and investigated him. But he was re-arrested on April 4, 1995 and held captive for almost eight months until he was set free by Justice Tijanni Abdullahi Special Military Tribunal in October of 1995. When INSIDERWEEKLY met Hosa to explain his ordeal with NDLEA and why he was detained, he referred the magazine to his lawyer Morayo Lebi. Hosa who was obviously angry at the insinuations on his involvement with drug trafficking said, “I don't want to talk about this matter. My lawyer who handled the case is still alive. Go and talk to him.”

Lebi told this magazine that Hosa's ordeal in the hands of Bamaiyi's NDLEA was a frame up by his envious business associates. “The NDLEA acted on an anonymous petition, Lebi's said, According to the lawyer when this petition was received by NDLEA they decided to arrest Captain Hosa. He was interrogated, investigated and released after a few weeks in custody. Apparently the petitioners were ready to do him in, so they pressed their buttons to ensure my client was re-arrested and kept in custody in perpetuity until we went to court to seek his release or trial, if any evidence exist for such.”

Segun Roland, the investigating officer of NDLEA who handled the matter told INSIDERWEEKLY that he handled the investigation of Hosa on behalf of the

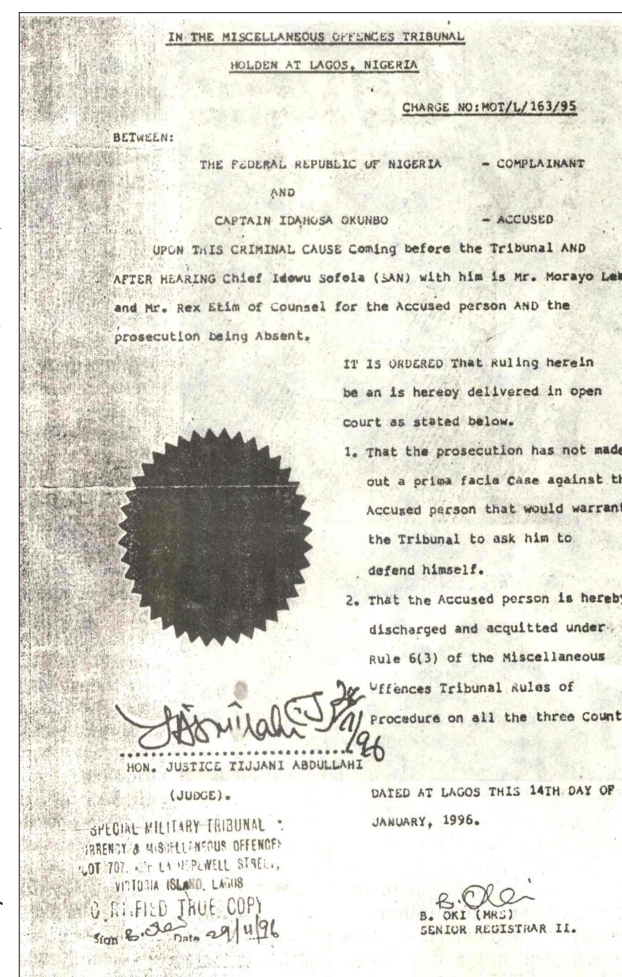


HOSA being congratulated by his lawyers and relatives on regaining his freedom in 1995.

Agency. “Hosa was initially arrested by NDLEA officers at Ilupeju branch based on a petition. That was on February 18, 1995 but he was released on March 7, 1995 after interrogation and investigation and no case was established against him. When he was re-arrested, the then NDLEA chairman, Bamaiyi personally asked me to handle the case since I was in the Task Force then.”

Roland disclosed that the major allegation against Hosa by the petitioner was that he owned a palatial House in Ikeja. I did a thorough investigation and found that he was a pilot for over 10 years and retired into business. He was into petrochemicals and did contracts with Shell, Chevron and some other oil companies. We wrote to Shell and they replied that he handled over \$5 million contract with them, we got estate valuers from the federal ministry of works to value the said house and the cost was put at between N10 – N15 million as at then. We also investigated his furniture company in Opebi, Ikeja and factory in Benin City. Really, when we looked at the volume of his businesses it was obvious he had the resources to build that kind of house.”

“Also, at the time of his arrest there was no drug offender in our cell that mentioned his name as a godfather or baron. Hence, after the findings, I recommended that we have no evidence to prove our case against him.



Sadly, he was still left in the cell without release until he instituted a case in court.”

When Bamaiyi refused to release the former pilot turned businessman, his

lawyers filed a suit demanding for his immediate release or trial forthwith. During the trial, Roland who said he was later punished by his boss for not roping Hosa told the court the findings from his investigations. He indeed noted that the Drug Agency could not prove any case against Hosa.

Delivering judgement in the charge no MOT/L/163/95. Honourable Justice Tijanni Abdullahi said “the prosecution has not made out a prima facie case against the accused person that would warrant the Tribunal to ask him to defend himself. That the accused person is hereby discharged and acquitted under rule 6 (3) of the miscellaneous offences Tribunal Rules of Procedure on all the three counts.”

Consequently, Hosa regained freedom and deployed his energy into business once gain. In the words of Lebi, “it is evidently clear that Hosa is a thorough going legitimate businessman with nothing shady to hide.”

And Lebi disclosed that he anticipated the kind of controversies trailing Hosa today. “Because of how the petition came I knew that somebody in the future others may want to rubbish the reputation of my client with this case.

Therefore, I ensure adequate media coverage and documentation of all that transpired. He prevented clips of newspapers, including that of *Tribune, Nigerian Observer* and *defunct weekend Sunray newspaper* dated Saturday, March 2, 1996.

Now all doubting Thomases should keep sealed lips, Lebi cautioned. ●