

Mokone sentenced for assault with lye

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Stephen Mokone broke into restrained sobs several times yesterday as Superior Court Judge Charles M. Morris sentenced him to an eight- to 12-year New Jersey State Prison term for a brutal lye attack on his ex-wife Joyce more than a year ago.

The judge termed the assault "willful and premeditated," and denied requests for leniency by Mokone's lawyer, Ronald Reba of Sayreville.

The attorney asked that his client, a former South African soccer star, be given a year imprisonment. He also requested that Mokone, a former psychiatric social worker, be allowed to use his skills in clinics during probation.

"Once a professor," Reba said of his 45-year-old client, "and now an inmate."

But Assistant Middlesex County Prosecutor JoYce Munkacsy told of the disfiguring effects of the Nov. 20, 1977 attack that took place outside a friend's home on Wood Lake Drive, Piscataway.

Mrs. Mokone, a registered nurse, must wear a wig and long sleeves to hide the burn scars, the assistant prosecutor said.

"Steve Mokone asks for compassion," she continued. "But he has none for his wife, who must live out her days with the reminder of the savage assault against her."

Thinking her husband was in South Africa at a funeral on the night of the attack, Mrs. Mokone at first didn't recognize the driver of the car that bumped hers.

When she got out to investigate, she saw her estranged husband and ran. She tripped and fell, and he splashed her with the lye solution, shattering its container, a glass ice bucket, on the ground.

Morris sentenced Mokone, an East Brunswick resident, to a five- to seven-year term for atrocious assault and battery, and imposed a consecutive three- to five-year term for having been armed with the lye.

Mokone had waived trial and pleaded guilty to the charges Oct. 31.

Hearing the terms of his sentence, the goateed defendant told the judge: "If I had to choose between death and that, I think I would choose death."

The lye attack "was indeed savagely brutal and cruel," said the judge. "It almost would have been better had you shot her."

And considering Mokone's background — as a former psychiatric social worker for the Rutgers Community Mental Health Center and as an assistant professor of psychiatry at Rutgers University and Rutgers Medical School — the choice of corrosive fluid "was extremely inappropriate," Morris added. "It would be like me doing it."

Reba said his client had been a "victim of apartheid in his native country (South Africa)," before going to Europe "at the age of 20 years and becoming a soccer star of world renown."

Confronted with his failed marriage, Mokone "committed a crime of passion," the lawyer said, but should not be confined to jail like a common criminal.

In exchange for Mokone's guilty pleas, the state agreed to drop several other charges related to the attack, including a charge of credit card misuse.

Bail for Mokone had been set at \$150,000.

He now faces charges in two other states stemming from acid attacks on women.

Mokone and Isaiah Campbell of New Brunswick, a former client at the Rutgers Community Mental Health Center, were indicted last summer for first-degree assault.

The charge stemmed from a sulfuric acid attack on Ann Marie Boylan, an Englewood attorney who had represented Mrs. Mokone in divorce proceedings.

That incident took place on Oct. 8, 1977.

And Mokone is under indictment in Maryland for attempting to break into the Capitol Heights home of Carolyn Rice last year.