



R

v

AXEL RUDAKUBANA

SENTENCING NOTE

1. During this sentence hearing Axel Rudakubana was determined to disrupt the proceedings so that he would not have to face the victims of his crimes and justice. I was required to have him removed from court, not because that is what he wanted, but he was preventing the hearing from being held in the normal way. Accordingly, I pass sentence in his voluntary absence whilst his Counsel, both Leading and Junior, and solicitor are present in Court.
2. On the 29th July last year Rudakubana left home and travelled by taxi to The Hart Space in Hart Street, Southport, armed with a large kitchen knife which he had bought on the internet on the 13th July. He knew that there was to be a Taylor Swift themed Yoga and Dance Workshop, where very young girls mostly aged between 6 and 11, were to enjoy an organised party safely in an upstairs room, where the organisers were to look after them. There were 26 children at the party, all of them happy and enjoying themselves. It started at 9.30 that morning on a warm summer's day, but he had targeted those very young children for the horrific, extreme violence he was intent upon.
3. At 11.45 that morning he arrived and walked straight into the building, up the stairs to where he could hear the sound of happy children. In his mind was the intention to murder as many of them as he physically could. He wanted to try and carry out mass murder of innocent, happy young girls. Over about 15 minutes he savagely killed three of them, and attempted to kill eight more, as

well as two adults who tried to stop him. It was of such extreme violence, of the utmost and exceptionally high seriousness, that it is difficult to comprehend why it was done.

4. I am sure that Rudakubana had a settled and determined intention to carry out these offences, and that had he been able to, he would have killed each and every child, all 26 of them, as well as any adults who got in his way. It was only because some managed to escape, that prevented many more from being murdered. I am also sure that after the other children, eight of whom he had very seriously injured, managed to escape, it left him in the upstairs room and landing, where he returned to continue his sustained and brutal violence against two of the youngest of those children, stabbing them multiple times. That demonstrated how determined you were to cause the maximum suffering you could. Left alone with them where they had fallen, he continued shocking and extreme violence.
5. Many, who have heard the evidence summarised by the prosecution in this hearing and having seen the CCTV recordings played with a view from the outside of the building, might describe what he did as evil; who could dispute it? On any view, it was at least the most extreme, shocking and exceptionally serious crime.
6. In describing the injuries caused to each of the victims I will summarise the evidence, being conscious that the families of Elsie Stancombe, Bebe King and Alice Da Silva Aguiar are in court, as are the families of each of the other victims. It is necessary, however, in sentencing briefly to refer to the injuries.
7. Elsie Stancombe was aged only 7 when Rudakubana inflicted at least 85 sharp force injuries to her head, face, neck, torso and upper limbs; severe force was used to cause her death.
8. Bebe King was aged only 6 when he inflicted at least 122 sharp force injuries to her head, face, neck, torso and upper limbs. It was the opinion of Dr Cieka, the

Pathologist, that Rudakubana had tried to decapitate her. He concluded that severe force was used to kill her.

9. Alice Da Silva Aguiar was aged 9 when he stabbed her, including a chop wound to her head and four stab wounds to her back, causing substantial internal injury. Although she managed to escape out of the building, she collapsed, and despite all medical help, she died in hospital at 1.20am the following day.
10. C1 was aged 7. She almost managed to escape, but Rudakubana were seen to pull her back into the building and attack her. Stabbing her 32 times, including 23 to her back and arms, causing her life-threatening injuries. Fortunately, she survived, and could be seen on CCTV collapsing outside.
11. C2, who was aged 10 was stabbed eight times, once to the front of her chest and six deep wounds to her back before she managed to escape.
12. C3 was aged 9 and was stabbed three times in the back, causing fractures to her shoulder blade, a rib and undisplaced fractures to two spinal vertebrae, caused with severe force. She managed to escape.
13. C4 was aged 8 and was stabbed four times to her back and another to her left arm, before she escaped.
14. C5 was aged 10. She was caused life-threatening injuries from two deep stab wounds to the back of her chest and substantial internal bleeding before she escaped. Her injuries necessitated the removal of her spleen as well as a blood transfusion.
15. C6, aged 13, who Victim Personal Statement was read by her bravely during this hearing also required a blood transfusion to replace the major loss of blood caused by two stab wounds. One was to her right shoulder and her back, causing life-threatening internal injury. Also, she suffered fractures to two of her spinal vertebrae. Severe force was used to cause those injuries with the knife before she escaped.

16. C7, who is the younger sister of C2, was also a victim of this attack. She had a single stab wound to her back which reached her spine but fortunately didn't cause damage to it. She managed to escape despite her injury.
17. C8 was aged 7 and suffered a deep wound to her arm and a laceration to her chin before she escaped.
18. Leanne Lucas was one of the adult organisers of the party and was looking after all of the children. As she tried to save as many children as she could, Rudakubana attacked her also. She did all she could before escaping, but suffered five stab wounds to her head, neck, back, shoulder blade and arm. She required a blood transfusion. She also suffered fractures to a spinal vertebrae, a rib and shoulder blade, all caused by severe force.
19. Jonathan Hayes was an adult working in a different part of the upstairs to the building. After he heard the disturbance, he went out to see what had happened and was attacked with the knife. Rudakubana stabbed him in the leg, causing a deep wound, as he tried to kill him. He was only saved when another witness appeared.
20. I have read each of the Victim Personal Statements and many have been read out to the court. They are all deeply moving. The harm that Rudakubana has caused to each family, each child and to the community has been profound and permanent. For the families of Elsie, Bebe and Alice, they will never recover from what happened to their daughters. For those children and the adults that he attempted to murder, their lives will never be the same, nor will their families who are left to look after their exceptionally brave daughters. Also, for the emergency services, whose personnel had to deal with the aftermath.
21. In just under 15 minutes Rudakubana murdered 3 children, attempted to murder 8 other children and also 2 adults. He was prevented from murdering more, only by the escape of the other children.

22. When the police arrived, at about 12 noon they found him standing over the body of Bebe King and still holding your knife. It was Bebe who had suffered at least 122 separate knife wounds. He was arrested and taken into custody. Whilst Rudakubana did not say anything in his police interviews he did make unsolicited comments, which are deeply disturbing, including "I'm glad to see those kids are dead, it makes me happy" and "It's a good thing those children are dead".
23. In his home the police discovered clear evidence of a settled intention to carry out mass killing. On one of his computers were files proving that he had a long standing preoccupation with violent killing and genocide. Of particular significance were copies of an Al-Qaeda training manual, which described methods of killing with a knife and where to attack the victim. Part of it referred to attacking the head and neck, just as he had done to some of the victims in this case.
24. Also, the manual provided instruction on how to produce Ricin, a highly dangerous toxin, which can cause multiple deaths and has no known antidote. I am sure that he had followed those instructions, because the police found in his bedroom the materials to produce Ricin and a pulp residue within a container. That was examined by an expert in chemical and biological warfare agents, Dr Martin Pearce, and confirmed it was Ricin pulp and castor oil. His opinion was that there was sufficient Ricin pulp, that with some further purification process it would have provided a range of up to 1,269 doses, which would cause death if inhaled. However, there was no evidence that Rudakubana had recently tried purification.
25. I am satisfied that for some time he had planned to kill as many people as he could, as the prosecution have called it "a mass killing". He bought the knife he wanted to use, which had a particularly sharp point; he had read information on how to stab people with greatest effect to kill them; he saw the publicity for a children's party in Southport at The Hart Space Dance Studio and decided to kill

as many as you could, targeting very young children. I am also satisfied that if he hadn't decided that way of killing, in time he was likely to use the Ricin he had produced.

26. The prosecution have made it clear that these proceedings were not acts of terrorism within the meaning of the terrorism legislation, because there is no evidence that Rudakubana's purpose was to advance a political, religious, racial or ideological cause. I must accept that conclusion. However, in my judgment, his culpability for this extreme level of violence is equivalent in its seriousness to terrorist murders, whatever his purpose. Whether his motivation was for terrorism or not misses the point. What he did on the 29th July last year has caused such shock and revulsion to the whole nation, that it must be viewed as being at the extreme level of crime. His culpability, and the harm he caused and intended, were at the highest. I do not, however, take into account against him, what happened in different parts of the country after his arrest, he did not cause that.

27. Axel Rudakubana was born in Cardiff on the 7th August of 2006. He is a UK citizen now aged 18, but was still 17 when he committed these offences. He was only nine days short of his 18th birthday, which has a particular significance. Had he been 18, I make it clear that I would have been compelled to impose on him, life imprisonment without a minimum term, otherwise known as a whole life term, meaning that he would never be released. However, the law does not permit such a sentence for those offenders who are under 18 when they offend.

28. Rudakubana has only one previous conviction. On the 19th February 2020, when he was aged 13, for possession of a knife on school premises, assault and possession of an offensive weapon in a public place. He was made subject to a juvenile Referral Order. Those offences took place when he returned to the school from which he had been excluded due to his previous behaviour. He entered the school without permission, carrying a knife and hockey stick, intent on attacking another pupil whom he said had bullied him.

29. For the offence of Murder on Counts 1, 2 and 3 the sentence must be Custody for Life. I am required to fix the minimum term which he must serve in custody before he may apply to the Parole Board for his release. It will be for the Board to decide if he is ever safe to be released into the community and if ever he is, he will remain on licence for the rest of his life, subject to recall into custody if he breaches his licence terms. The minimum term I will fix will be a very substantial one and the very least he will be detained, which will mean that he will serve almost the whole of his life in custody. I consider at this time that it is likely that he will never be released and that he will be in custody for all his life.

30. The Starting Point in deciding the minimum term in custody on Counts 1 – 3, must be 27 years, because he was 17 years old when he murdered Elsie, Bebe and Alice. I find the following circumstances make those murders yet more serious. Firstly, there are two exceptionally high factors that would, but for his age, require me to impose a whole life term:- the murder of two or more persons where each murder involved a substantial degree of premeditation or planning, and it was in each case the murder of a child with such premeditation or planning and it was in each case the murder. Secondly, the children were particularly vulnerable because of their very young age, being 7, 6 and 9 respectively. Thirdly, the physical suffering that he caused as he repeatedly stabbed them. Fourthly, there were three murders. Fifthly, at the time he carried out these murders, he also attempted to kill 10 more, eight of whom were also very young children. Sixthly, the severity of the injuries caused to the victims. Seventhly, he had produced the highly toxic poison Ricin, which he was very likely to use at some time had he not committed these offences.

31. In mitigation for this offending, Rudakubana is still only 18 years old. However, I consider that his age has already provided him with a substantial reduction in his sentence, because it means that he has avoided a whole life term. Whilst he has entered guilty pleas, saving the families and victims the pain of a trial, he cannot claim to have shown any remorse. His unsolicited comments in the police

station made clear his feelings. However, lack of remorse is not an aggravating factor.

32. I have read evidence within a statement of an Assistant Head Teacher which describes how Rudakubana's early years at school developed from a normal student to one who became increasingly threatening to those he felt had wronged him, leading to his exclusion. None of this gives any indication of what he was to do on the 29th July last year.
33. I have read the Intermediary Assessment Report, dated the 24th September 2024 in which its author said that he presented as having high functioning Autism and that he does not have any associated learning disabilities. The report found that he had some communication and attention difficulties. None of this offered any explanation for this offending. No further expert evidence has been provided on his behalf.
34. I have taken into account the Overarching Principles – Sentencing Children and Young People. The fact that he is now 18 years old does not make the guideline irrelevant. However, it does not appear that his emotional age is different to his chronological age. I will give him the appropriate discount to reflect the fact that whilst almost 18, he was still young.
35. In sentencing I will impose concurrent sentences, meaning that they will all be served at the same time. However, I will treat the Murder offences in Counts 1 – 3 as the lead offences, and take into account all of the total offending when fixing the minimum term of custody he must serve. Also, I have in mind the totality of the sentences, requiring me to take a step back and consider whether they are just and proportionate, and I conclude that they are.
36. The guilty pleas will allow some small discount on the sentence because they were entered so late, on the first day of the trial.

37. I turn to the Attempted Murder offences in Counts 4 – 13. Each of these offences requires me to impose concurrent sentences of Custody for Life under s. 272 Sentencing Act 2020. Each offence is within Schedule 19 of the Act; I am satisfied in the circumstances of these offences that Rudakubana is a Dangerous Offender, and that the circumstances justify the imposition of a life sentence. I must then fix the custodial term which he must serve.

38. For each of the offences where he attempted to murder a child, being Counts 4 – 11, the appropriate sentence guideline is category A2 with a Starting Point for sentence of 30 years, with a range up to 35 years. The very young age of each victim and the substantial planning by him, requires me to increase that sentence to the top of the range, before reducing it, to reflect his age, his late guilty plea and to reach the minimum term for these offences. Accordingly, I firstly reduce the sentence to 30 years for his age and 27 years for the guilty plea, leading to a minimum term of 18 years on each of Counts 4 – 11 concurrently.

39. On Counts 12 and 13, which are the Attempted Murder of the adults, Leanne Lucas and Jonathan Hayes, the guideline category is B2, with a Starting Point of 25 years and a range up to 30 years. With the same aggravating factors of seriousness and mitigation for Counts 4 – 11, I increase the sentence to 30 years, before reducing it to 27 years for age and to 24 years for guilty plea, leading to a minimum term on these two Counts of 16 years concurrently.

40. I turn now to remaining Counts. On Count 14, Having an Article with a Blade, the sentence is 18 months custody. This is a category 1A offence for which I have reduced the sentence to reflect his age and plea.

41. Count 15, Production of a Biological Toxin, there is no offence specific sentence guideline. I have been assisted by reference to the case of *R v Mohammed Ammer Ali* [2016] EWCA Crim 864, in which a sentence of 8 years imprisonment after conviction was upheld by the Court of Appeal, a decision based upon its own facts. I am satisfied that his production of Ricin was more advanced and is associated with Rudakubana's mindset to cause many killings, whilst he had not

used the Ricin by the time of his arrest. Taking into account his culpability and the harm risked, allowing for his age and guilty plea, I sentence him concurrently to 12 years custody.

42. Count 16, Possession of a Document Likely to be Useful to a Person Preparing an Act of Terrorism, the sentence is 18 months Custody, after taking into account his age and plea and applying the guideline category 3C.

43. I am now going to sentence Axel Rudakubana, having explained my reasons.

- On Counts 1 – 3, Murder, I sentence him to Custody for Life with a minimum term which he must serve in custody of 52 years, less the time he has already served. He has been in custody for 175 days on remand for which he will be credited. **Therefore, the minimum term is 51 years and 190 days.**
- On Counts 4 – 11, I sentence him concurrently to Custody for Life with a minimum term of 18 years, less 175 days served, on each Count concurrently with each other. Allowing for his time served on remand, the minimum term on those Counts is 17 years and 190 days.
- On Counts 12 and 13, I sentence him concurrently to Custody for Life with a minimum term of 16 years, less his time served on remand, on each Count concurrently with each other, leading to a minimum term on those Counts of 15 years and 190 days.
- On Counts 14 and 16, I sentence him to 18 months custody, concurrently with each other and on all offences.
- He will pay the appropriate under 18 Statutory Charge, which will be entered on the Court record.

44. Accordingly in total, I sentence Rudakubana to 13 sentences of Custody for Life, and a minimum term to be served in custody is 51 years and 190 days. It is highly likely that he will never be released.

