

Government response to the Streatham incident

With permission Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the senseless and horrific terror attack in Streatham yesterday afternoon.

Two members of the public were brutally stabbed as they went about their business on the busy High road.

Another was injured as our brave police stepped in before even more harm could be done.

And honourable Members I'm sure will join me in sending our thoughts and prayers to the victims, their families and to all those affected by this appalling attack.

I would also like to pay tribute to our outstanding emergency services who once again ran towards, ran towards untold danger to protect the public: the police who shot the offender to save others and the ambulance staff who fearlessly tended the wounded despite the risk to their own lives.

Protecting the public is, has to be the number one priority for this Government.

Operational Update

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Streatham incident is subject to an ongoing police investigation and as such, I am limited in what I can say at this time, but I would like to share what details I am able to with the House.

A known terrorist senselessly stabbed a man and a woman on Streatham High road about 2pm yesterday afternoon.

The attacker has yet to be formally identified, but police are confident that it was 20-year-old Sudesh Amman.

In December 2018 he was imprisoned for 3 years and 4 months for 16 counts of distributing extremist material and for the possession of material likely to be useful for the purposes of preparing a terrorist act.

The sentence he received was a standard determinate sentence and that means one week ago he was automatically released half way through that term.

The Parole Board had no involvement in the matter. The law required automatic unconditional release at the half-way point.

Amman was being followed by armed police officers when he made his attack, and they immediately shot him dead before he could harm any others.

They stepped in despite the fact he appeared to be wearing an explosive

device, which has now been confirmed as fake.

A female member of the public in her 20s was hurt by broken glass as shots were fired to end the threat.

She remains in hospital as does the male victim in his 40s, who I am pleased to say is now recovering after initially fighting for his life.

The other female victim in her 50s has since been discharged and our thoughts are with them all.

As this is an ongoing investigation it would be not appropriate for me to comment further on the case while the full facts are established.

But I would like to reassure Honourable Members that our outstanding security services and the police have the full support of the Government as they investigate this atrocity.

Managing terrorists

Madam Deputy Speaker I also want to talk about our security services, police, prison and probation officers and their joint response.

All of these operational agencies are truly first class and they are the epitome of public duty.

And the swift response to yesterday's attack, monitoring the threat and responding quickly when it escalated, can give us confidence that the police and security services are doing all they can to keep the public safe.

Our prisons

And our prisons and probation services have robust measures in place to deal with terrorist offenders and we are at the forefront of international efforts to counter this threat.

All terrorist prisoners and individuals who are considered to be an extremist risk are managed through a specialist case management process. Most can be dealt with as part of the mainstream prison population, but where it's necessary a small number of the very highest risk offenders are now managed in Separation Centres.

The time an offender spends in prison is an opportunity to do our best to rehabilitate, recognising that this is no simple challenge. Psychological, theological and mental health interventions are all used, and HMPPS psychologists supply two formal counter-radicalisation programmes used both in custody and in the community.

And in addition, the Desistance and Disengagement Programme (DDP) was rolled out in prisons in 2018. This provides a range of intensive, tailored interventions designed to address the root causes of terrorism.

And I want to pay tribute to the work of our prisons and probation staff, they are dedicated to keeping the public safe, they work tirelessly to try to turn lives around, even in the face of such a deep-seated ideology.

Counter Terrorism Bill

The tragic events at Fishmongers' Hall in November of last year showed that we need to look carefully at the way we deal with terrorist offenders.

And I have long been clear, as has my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister, that automatic half-way release is simply not right in all cases.

After the London Bridge attack, the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and I immediately promised a major shake-up of our response to terrorism.

And two weeks ago, the Home Secretary and I announced clear measures, a tough new approach and a new commitment to crack down on offenders and keep people safe. And those measures include:

Introducing longer and tougher sentences for serious terrorist offenders, ending release for them before the end of their custodial term and opening up longer licence periods, whilst keeping the worst offenders locked up for a mandatory minimum 14-year term.

Secondly, the overhauling of prisons and probation tougher monitoring conditions, including lie detector tests to assess risks

Thirdly, doubling the number of counter-terrorism probation officers.

And also investing in Counter-Terrorism Police, providing an increase in funding of £90m from April.

And finally, putting victims first by reviewing the support available to them, including an immediate £500k boost for the Victims of Terrorism Unit.

And we have also announced an independent review of our Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements, the MAPPAs, to be led by Jonathan Hall QC. And this is looking at pre-release planning as well as the management of offenders upon release in the community.

Many of these measures will be included in a new Counter-Terrorism (Sentencing and Release) Bill to be introduced in the first 100 days of this re-elected Government.

But Madam Deputy Speaker, yesterday's appalling incident makes the case plainly for immediate action.

We cannot have the situation, as we saw tragically in yesterday's case, where an offender – a known risk to innocent members of the public – is released early by automatic process of law, without any oversight by the Parole Board.

We will be doing everything we can to protect the public, that is our primary duty. And we will therefore introduce emergency legislation to ensure an end

to terrorist offenders getting released automatically, having served half of their sentence with no check or review. The underlying principle has to be that offenders will no longer be released early automatically and that any release before the end of their sentence will be dependent on risk assessment by the Parole Board.

We face an unprecedented situation of severe gravity and, as such, it demands that the government responds immediately and that this legislation will therefore also apply to serving prisoners.

Now, the earliest point at which these offenders will now be considered for release will be once they have served two-thirds of their sentence and, crucially, we will introduce a requirement that no terrorist offender will be released before the end of the full custodial term unless the Parole Board agrees. And we will ensure that the functions of the Parole Board are strengthened to deal even more effectively with the specific risk that terrorists pose to public safety. So for example, we will ensure that the appropriate specialisms are in place. That work is in train and we will take steps to implement this as soon as possible.

When someone is released we will always ensure that terrorist offenders are subject to the most robust safeguards. And we will consider whether new legislation is required to provide additional assurance.

And finally, we will review whether the current maximum penalties and sentencing framework for terrorist offences is indeed sufficient or comprehensive on the underlying principle that terrorist offenders should no longer be released until the Parole Board is satisfied that they are no longer a risk to the public.

Conclusion

As I have said Madam Deputy Speaker, keeping our streets and our people safe is our first duty.

We face a threat from an ideology that takes no heed for others, and we must use every tool we can to make sure that that threat is neutralised.

The British public have a proud history of coming together in times of adversity against those who seek to divide us.

And it is together we can make sure that the terrorists who seek to threaten our way of life will never win.

This Government will do everything in our power to defeat them and to ensure the public is protected.

And I commend this statement to the House.