

Hotelier who imprisoned and raped woman sees his sentence increased

News story

Paul Harris, 36, has had his sentence increased after it was referred to the Court of Appeal by the Solicitor General Alex Chalk QC MP.



A manager of an Oxfordshire Bed and Breakfast has had his sentence for false imprisonment and rape increased following a referral to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme.

Paul Leonard Harris, 36, held the woman against her will for four days at the hotel where he worked in April 2019. During those four days he degraded the victim and filmed her, before raping her.

Harris eventually pled guilty and was convicted of false imprisonment, three counts of causing a person to engage in penetrative sexual activity without consent, and of rape.

On 2 December 2021, he was sentenced to 8 years 9 months' imprisonment at Oxford Crown Court.

On 3 February, the Court of Appeal found his original sentence to be unduly lenient and increased it to 12 years' imprisonment.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General, Alex Chalk QC MP, said:

The victim in this case was subjected to a harrowing ordeal, mistreated and abused by Harris. I had no hesitation in referring his sentence to the Court of Appeal as I believed it to be unduly lenient when looking at the seriousness of his crimes in totality. I am glad that today the Court agreed and increased this man's sentence.

Attempted murderer has sentence increased following personal intervention by the Attorney General

News story

Stephen Gibbs, 46, has had his sentence increased after the Attorney General, Rt Hon Suella Braverman QC MP personally presented the case at the Court of Appeal



A Barry man guilty of attempted murder has had his sentence increased after the Attorney General, Rt Hon Suella Braverman QC MP, personally presented the case at the Court of Appeal.

Stephen Gibbs, 46, assaulted his partner in the home he shared with her before he began repeatedly stabbing her in the face with a kitchen knife, stating that he was going to kill her.

On 6 December 2021, Gibbs was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment comprising a custodial term of 13 years and an extension period of 5 years at Merthyr Tydfil Crown Court, for attempted murder.

Following the sentencing, the case was referred to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme.

On 3 February the Court of Appeal, sitting at Cardiff Crown Court, found his original sentence to be unduly lenient and increased it to 20 years and 7 months' imprisonment and 5 years on licence.

Speaking after the hearing, the Attorney General, Suella Braverman QC MP, said:

This was a terrifying attack by the offender, Stephen Gibbs, using a knife no less than seven times to stab the victim in the face.

I presented this case before the Court of Appeal today because I believed it to be unduly lenient and that the sentence needed to reflect the seriousness of what the offender had intended, namely to kill. I am glad that the Court of Appeal agreed and saw fit to increase this sentence.

The Court of Appeal regularly sits in Crown Courts around England and Wales, and the hearing took place in Cardiff Crown Court.

Published 3 February 2022

[British High Commissioner visits Balochistan; Chaman Border](#)

World news story

British High Commissioner, Dr Christian Turner CMG, has visited the Chaman Border to see at first hand how the UK and Pakistan are working together to help the people of Afghanistan.



During his visit he was briefed by Pakistani officials on border processes, and how authorities are working with the UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency.

It was part of a wider visit to Balochistan, during which he met the Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo, and discussed how the issues in Afghanistan are affecting Balochistan, as well as the wider security situation in the area, and the protection of human rights.

During his two day trip the High Commissioner also met Comd 12 Corps, Lieutenant General Sarfraz, and gave a keynote speech at the Quetta Staff and Command College.

British High Commissioner, Dr Christian Turner, CMG said:

It's very important for the UK to understand the issues facing Balochistan. During my visit to the Chaman Border I saw how the UK is working to help the people of Afghanistan, and that this is vital for the stability of the whole region.

Last week, the UK's Foreign Secretary Liz Truss pledged £97m of additional funds to help Afghanistan this winter.

Notes to editors:

1. The UK pledged £97 million of emergency aid for vital humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan this winter, on January 28th. The funding will provide over 2.7 million people with food, health services, and water amid a worsening crisis.
2. This latest allocation of vital support means the UK has now delivered on its promise to double UK aid to Afghanistan, with £286 million committed this financial year. UK aid allocated since October will support over 60 hospitals, provide health services for over 300,000 people; ensure 4.47 million people get emergency food assistance through the World Food Programme; and provide 6.1 million people with emergency health, water, protection, shelter, food, and education support through the UN Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund.

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Published 3 February 2022

Political prisoners in Belarus: joint statement, 3 February 2022

Mr Chair,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, and the United States.

Civil society organisations reported last week that the number of political prisoners in Belarus has now reached 1,000 and continues to grow.

[The Vienna \(Human Dimension\) Mechanism was invoked on 5 November 2021 by a group of 35 participating States](#), indicating continuing concerns about the situation in Belarus. An initial response to the subsequent reply provided by the Belarusian Delegation was provided in a statement on 18 November 2021. In that initial response, regret was expressed that there appeared to be no material change in approach by the Belarusian authorities. The shameful milestone of 1,000 political prisoners demonstrates that it was right to remain concerned.

The initial letter invoking the Vienna Mechanism asked for information on the credible reports of continuing arbitrary or unjust arrests or detentions, and on the targeting of opposition figures. The reply of 12 November 2021 by the Belarusian Delegation took exception to the words “political prisoner”.

We wish to be crystal clear. By “political prisoners” we mean individuals who have been detained or imprisoned for politically motivated reasons for peacefully exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association. It includes where the length of detention or the conditions of detention are clearly not proportionate. In this regard, we reference the cases mentioned in the invocation of the Vienna Mechanism, including the cases of Maria Kolesnikava and Maksim Znak.

Despite the pressures they are facing, Civil Society Organisations and human rights defenders have continued to monitor the numbers of political prisoners in Belarus. The well-respected civil society organisation Viasna lists political prisoners according to the criteria of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Set against those criteria, Viasna judges that today there are currently 1,022 political prisoners in Belarus.

Unfortunately, Viasna and its staff have also been subject to harassment and unjust detention. Some of the more than a thousand political prisoners being held include Viasna staff and volunteers, dedicated human rights defenders who want to see a better future for their country – individuals such as

Viasna Chairman Ales Bialiatski, Valiantsin Stefanovich and Volunteer Coordinator Marfa Rabkova.

Other high profile cases of concern include those of Viktor Babaryka, as well as the 14 December 2021 politically motivated convictions of Belarusian opposition figures Syarhey Tsikhanouski, Mikalai Statkevich, Radio Liberty journalist Ihar Losik, and chairwoman of a national minority organisation, Andželika Borys.

Mr Chair,

The Belarusian Delegation has often claimed to seek a dialogue on the issues which we have regularly raised in the Permanent Council. The Vienna Mechanism is a tool for such dialogue, but in order for it to be a true dialogue it requires the Belarusian authorities to engage substantively, realistically and honestly on the subject. It requires them to recognise our legitimate continuing concerns, which mirror those of civil society, independent media and human rights defenders.

As part of our efforts to create a constructive dialogue, we today ask the Delegation of Belarus to consider carefully, and reply to, the following questions:

(i) will the Belarusian authorities, in the interests of transparency and dialogue, publish their full response to the Vienna Mechanism invocation?

(ii) to enhance the base of independent evidence for our dialogue, will the Belarusian authorities invite ODIHR to monitor any criminal or administrative trials that ODIHR deem to be of wider interest to the participating States?

(iii) to enhance the base of independent evidence for our dialogue, will the Belarusian authorities agree to an inquiry by an independent international expert, or experts, given the mounting credible reports of arbitrary or unjust arrests or detentions, of the targeting for reprisal of opposition figures, and of political prisoners?

Finally, we again call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Belarus. We urge the Belarusian authorities to fully implement their international obligations and OSCE commitments, and to make use of the OSCE's tools and mechanisms to help resolve the continuing crisis.

We request that this statement be added to the journal of the day.

Chancellor's statement to the House –

Energy Price Cap

Mr Speaker,

The UK's economic recovery has been quicker and stronger than forecast.

In the depths of the pandemic, our economy was expected to return to its pre-crisis level at the end of 2022.

Instead, it got there in November 2021 – a full year earlier.

Unemployment was expected to peak at nearly 12%.

Instead, it peaked at 5.2% and has now fallen to just over 4% – saving more than 2 million jobs.

And with the fastest growing economy in the G7 this year...

Over 400,000 more people on payrolls than before the pandemic...

And business investment rising...it's no wonder Mr Speaker, that borrowing is set to fall from £320bn last year...

...the highest ever peacetime level...

...to £46bn by the end of this Parliament.

As we emerge from the depths of the worst recession in 300 years, we should be proud of our economic record.

The economy is stronger because of the plan we put in place; because of the actions we took to protect families and businesses.

And that plan is working.

But for all the progress we are making – the job is not yet done.

Right now, I know the number one issue on people's minds is the rising cost of living.

It is the independent Bank of England's role to deliver low and stable inflation – and the Governor will set out their latest judgements at midday today.

And just as the government stood behind the British people through the pandemic...

...so we will help people deal with one of the biggest costs they now face – energy.

The energy regulator, Ofgem, announced this morning that the energy price cap will rise in April to £1,971 – an increase of £693 for the average household.

Without government action, this would be incredibly tough for millions of hardworking families.

So the government is going to step in to directly help people manage those extra costs.

Mr Speaker,

Before I set out the steps we are taking, let me explain what's happening to energy prices, and why.

People's energy bills are rising because it is more expensive for the companies who supply our energy to buy oil, coal, and gas.

Of the £693 increase in the April price cap, around 80% comes from wholesale energy prices.

Over the last year, the price of gas alone has quadrupled.

And because over 85% of homes in Britain are heated with a gas boiler, and around 40% of our electricity comes from gas, this is hitting households hard.

The reasons gas prices are soaring are global.

Across Europe and Asia, a long, cold winter last year depleted gas stores.

Disruption to other energy sources like nuclear and wind left us relying more than usual on gas during the summer months.

Surging demand in the world's manufacturing centres in Asia...

...at the same time as countries like China are moving away from coal...

...is further increasing demand for gas.

And concerns about a possible Russian incursion into Ukraine are putting further pressure on wholesale gas markets.

And so prices are rising.

Mr Speaker,

The price cap has meant that the impact of soaring gas prices has so far fallen mainly on energy companies.

So much so, that some suppliers who couldn't afford to meet those extra costs have gone out of business as a result.

It is not sustainable to keep holding the price of energy artificially low.

For me to stand here and pretend we don't have to adjust to paying higher prices would be wrong and dishonest.

But what we can do is take the sting out of a significant price shock for millions of families...

...by making sure the increase in prices is smaller initially and spread over a longer period.

Mr Speaker,

Without government intervention, the increase in the price cap would leave the average household having to find an extra £693.

The actions I'm announcing today will provide, to the vast majority of households, just over half that amount – £350.

In total, the government is going to help around 28 million households this year.

Taken together, this is a plan to help with the cost of living worth around £9bn.

We're delivering that support in three different ways.

First, we will spread the worst of the extra costs of this year's energy price shock over time.

This year, all domestic electricity customers will receive an upfront discount on their bills worth £200.

Energy suppliers will apply the discount on people's bills from October.

With the government meeting the cost in full.

That discount will be automatically repaid from people's bills in equal £40 instalments over the next five years.

This is the right way to support people while staying on track with our plans to repair the public finances.

And because we are taking a fiscally responsible approach, we can also provide more help, faster, to those who need it most – the second part of our plan.

We're going to give people a £150 Council Tax rebate to help with the cost of energy, in April – and this discount won't need to be repaid.

And I do want to be clear with the House that we are deliberately not just giving support to people on benefits.

Lots of people on middle incomes are struggling right now, too – so I've decided to provide the council tax rebate to households in Bands A to D.

This means around 80% of all homes in England will benefit.

And the third part of our plan will provide local authorities with a

discretionary fund of nearly £150m...

...to help those lower income households who happen to live in higher Council Tax properties...

...and households in bands A-D who are exempt from Council Tax.

We're also confirming today that we'll go ahead with existing plans to expand eligibility for the Warm Home Discount by almost a third...

...so that 3m vulnerable households will now benefit from that scheme.

And that's not all we're doing to help vulnerable households.

We're providing £3bn over this Parliament to help more than half a million lower income homes become more energy efficient, saving them on average £290 per year.

Increasing the National Living Wage to £9.50 an hour in April, a pay rise of over £1,000 for 2 million low paid workers.

And providing an effective tax cut for those on Universal Credit, allowing almost 2 million households to keep an average of £1,000 per year.

The payment through energy suppliers will apply across England, Wales and Scotland.

Energy policy is devolved in Northern Ireland, with a different regulator, and the government does not have the legal powers to intervene.

So we will make sure the Executive is funded to do something similar, with around £150m for Northern Ireland through the Barnett formula next year.

And because the Council Tax system is England only, total Barnett consequential of around £565m will be provided to the devolved administrations in the usual way.

Mr Speaker,

I know that some in this House have argued for a VAT cut on energy.

However, that policy would disproportionately benefit wealthier households.

There would also be no guarantee that suppliers would pass on the discounts to all customers.

And we should be honest with ourselves: this would become a permanent Government subsidy on everyone's bills.

A permanent subsidy worth £2.5 billion every year – at a time when we are trying to rebuild the public finances.

Instead, our plan allows us to provide more generous support, faster, to those who need it most, providing 28m households with at least £200, and the

vast majority receiving £350.

It is fair, it is targeted, it is proportionate – it is the right way to help people with the spike in energy costs.

Mr Speaker,

Today's announcements are just one part of the government's plan to tackle this country's most pressing economic challenges.

A plan for growth – with record investments in infrastructure, innovation and skills.

A plan to restore the public finances – with debt falling by the end of this Parliament.

A plan to cut waiting lists and back the NHS with £29bn over three years and a permanent new source of funding.

And, with the measures I've announced today – a plan to help with the rising cost of energy with £350 more in the pockets of tens of millions of hard working families.

That's our plan to build a stronger economy – not just today but for the long term.

And I commend it to this House.