

British teenager given suspended sentence in Cyprus rape case

Updated

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A British teenager, convicted of falsely accusing a group of Israelis of gang-rape, covers her face as she arrives at the Famagusta District Court in Paralimni in eastern Cyprus on January 7, 2020. - The 19-year-old was found guilty last week and could face up to a year in jail, after what her defence team blasted as a litany of rights failings by Cypriot authorities. (Photo by Iakovos HATZISTAVROU / AFP) (Photo by IAKOVOS HATZISTAVROU/AFP via Getty Images)GETTY IMAGES

The British teenager convicted in Cyprus of making false gang rape allegations received a suspended jail sentence today and brought to an end a court case that has caused international outcry.

The 19-year-old from Derbyshire wept and was consoled by her mother in Famagusta court as Judge Michalis Papathanasiou read out the sentence and told her she “deserves a second chance”. The woman was given a four-month sentence suspended for three years and fined €140.

This week Dominic Raab, the foreign secretary, had called on Cyprus to “do the right thing” following a trial that has been dogged by claims that the judge ignored key evidence supporting the woman’s claim that she was raped by a group of Israeli men and boys.

The judge said: “I admit that I have been troubled over this — all the evidence shows she had lied and prevented the police from doing other serious jobs. Twelve people were arrested and at least seven were not free for ten days.

“This is also a serious offence, but the fact that she has missed her academic studies and her youthfulness, in prison for a month, away from her home and family have led to the decision for the sentence to be suspended.”

About a hundred Israeli women had flown over to show their support for the woman today and they were joined by Cypriot women wearing masks with sewn up mouths.

Although the verdict brings to an end a five-month ordeal, the woman’s legal team said that she would appeal against her conviction, which it is thought could take between two and four years.

On July 17 last year the woman claimed that a group of Israeli friends, one of whom she had been having a relationship with while working in a resort, gang raped her at Pambos Napa Rocks hotel in Ayia Napa. After running semi-naked from the budget hotel room, she reported the incident to police and they arrested the man she had been seeing and 11 others aged 15-22. All of those arrested denied the allegations.

After more than seven hours of questioning by police without a lawyer the woman retracted her statement.

The men were allowed to return to Israel and were filmed being greeted at the airport by their families, opening champagne and singing “the Brit is a whore”.

The woman was remanded in custody for a month where she shared a jail cell with eight other women and charged with making a false rape claim. She was granted bail at the end of August but had not been allowed to leave the island.

Her lawyers tried to get her statement exonerating the men withdrawn, saying it had been made under duress. During the trial, a linguist said that the statement she gave to police retracting the rape claim contained mistakes that appeared to suggest it was dictated to her by police officers.

A defence pathologist also said that photographs of 35 bruises on her body were evidence that she had been raped. Despite the woman claiming she had been pinned down by her shoulders, no photos were taken of her upper body.

Nevertheless, the judge ruled that police had acted within the law at all times.

The trial began in October and following a series of delays the judge found the woman guilty last week, a decision that was immediately criticised by the Foreign Office.

At times during the proceedings the judge shouted at the woman and demanded she show the court “respect”.

Critics condemned the ruling and said that it was made to protect Cyprus’s tourism industry, which is worth 22 per cent of the country’s GDP. About 1.3 million Britons visited the island last year, accounting for about a third of all tourists and making up the largest single group of tourists.

A social media campaign to boycott the country was backed by the woman’s mother.

During the trial the mother gained power of attorney so that she could defer five university offers to study policing and criminology on her behalf of her daughter. Her mother, a project manager,

told *The Times* that her daughter's dreams of joining the police were in tatters as the conviction would prevent her becoming an officer.

She said since the attack her daughter has suffered from PTSD and sleeps for as much as 20 hours a day. She said that tweets naming her online were like a "life sentence" for her daughter.

It is thought the woman and her mother will be heading home today.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/president-of-cyprus-nicos-anastasiades-to-pardon-british-rape-case-teenager-w5spxdb0x?region=global>

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