

Rape claim teenager to appeal in Cyprus

updated

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January 3 2020, 9:00am, The Times



The 19-year-old, centre, who was convicted of lying, will be sentenced next Tuesday KATIA CHRISTODOULOU/EPA

A British teenager found guilty of making a false rape claim in Cyprus will appeal against her conviction even if she receives a suspended sentence, her lawyers confirmed yesterday.

The unidentified 19-year-old woman was convicted on Monday of “public mischief” and is scheduled to be sentenced next Tuesday. She potentially faces a year in prison and a £1,500 fine.

She said yesterday: “Every second of this ordeal has been a waking nightmare. I’m 19 and all I want to do is clear my name and come home to my family.

“I would say to both the foreign secretary and prime minister, both of whom are fathers, please support me with your actions, not just with your words. Time is running out for me. Please, please help,” she told *The Sun*.

The woman’s mother said that she backed a tourism boycott against Cyprus. “The place isn’t safe — it is absolutely not safe. And if you report something that’s happened to you, you’re either laughed at, as far as I can tell, or in the worst case something like what’s happened to my daughter may happen,” she told the *Today* programme on BBC Radio 4.

The English lawyer who is part of the team representing the woman said that regardless of the sentence handed down, they would appeal against the conviction to try to clear her name.

“Appealing against the conviction is the most important thing for a young person,” Michael Polak, director of the campaigning group Justice Abroad, said. The barrister said that even a suspended sentence — which would probably allow the woman to return to the UK immediately — would mean a criminal record and could damage her future.

The woman claimed that she had been raped by 12 Israelis, some of them boys, while on holiday in Ayia Napa last July. She withdrew the allegation after what she now says was an eight-hour police interview conducted under duress and without a lawyer present.

Appeals of criminal convictions in Cyprus can take up to two years to be heard.

Mr Polak said that there was “a marked difference” in the way the judge spoke to the prosecution lawyers compared with his “hostile” approach to the defence. “It was notable that the judge repeatedly said to the defence lawyers that the case before him was not about rape,” he said.

A Foreign Office spokesman told Press Association that Britain was “seriously concerned” about whether a fair trial had been guaranteed in this case, and said that the department would raise the issue with the Cypriot authorities.

A number of senior legal figures in Cyprus have written to Costas Clerides, the attorney-general, urging him to intervene in the case. Kypros Chrysostomides, the former justice minister, said that the woman had “already suffered a lot” and expected that her sentence would be “very lenient”. “She has already been in detention for four-and-a-half weeks and she has been prevented from travelling for about five months already,” he told the BBC.

The judge said that his decision was supported by video evidence showing the woman having consensual sex. He said that the only time she told the truth was when she was humiliated after learning that she had been filmed. “She knows she was never raped,” he said.

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