

REX V. A AND B.

SENTENCING REMARKS

1. On 23rd May, the two of you pleaded guilty to the murder of Kelyan Bokassa. You have also each pleaded guilty to having a knife in your possession.
2. On 7th January this year Kelyan boarded a number 472 bus in Woolwich. He had been at school that morning before returning home at about midday. Just after 2pm he boarded the bus at North Greenwich Station. He was due to attend an appointment at the Youth Justice Centre in Woolwich.
3. Once on the bus, Kelyan went upstairs and took a seat at the back on the upper deck. Twenty minutes later you both boarded that same bus. CCTV from the bus shows you were both armed with long machetes secreted about your clothing. Once on the bus you go straight upstairs and approach Kelyan. You all recognise each other. The two of you take out your machetes and immediately begin to attack Kelyan by stabbing him. The CCTV shows you were smiling as you attacked Kelyan.
4. There are 27 stabbing actions towards Kelyan's body. A, you make 15 stabbing actions, and B, you make 12. Audio from the CCTV reveals the screams from members of the public witnessing the attack. Kelyan attempted to defend himself using his bag.
5. After the attack you both go down to the lower deck before leaving the bus at the Woolwich Ferry bus stop. Passing police officers were flagged down and they along with members of the public made valiant attempts to save Kelyan's life. A HEMS team and paramedics then arrived and did the same. Despite all their efforts at 3.23pm that day Kelyan's life was pronounced extinct.
6. Police found a silver kitchen knife on Kelyan in his waistband. The CCTV footage shows that he did not produce it at any stage of the attack.

7. The postmortem examination showed the fatal wound to be one to the middle of the right thigh that severed the femoral artery. There were 8 stab wounds in total to his chest, left arm and thighs. Examination of the clothing and bag revealed areas of cut damage consistent with the blows seen on CCTV footage and Kelyan's efforts to defend himself.
8. Once you had left the bus you ran west in the direction of the river. B, you can be seen to discard something into the river and a later search of the riverbank revealed a machete. A, you phone your mother who arranged for a taxi to come to collect you and B. The taxi dropped you both in the Glyndon estate in Plumstead.
9. Three snapchat videos were created between 17:28 and 18:06 on 7th January. You appear in those videos. In them you can be seen making various hand gestures, dancing, and smoking.
10. You were arrested on 15th January 2025. When interviewed, A, you made 'no comment' responses to all the questions you were asked. B you took a similar approach save that you added that you were not involved.

Victim impact.

11. For any parent to lose a child is a tragedy and in the circumstances of this case, particularly so. No sentence of a court can ever reflect the loss of a life such as this young life. Kelyan's mother Marie, read her own statement as part of this sentencing hearing. She spoke in moving terms of the loss the death of her dear son: a young life gone in seconds. She spoke about the dreams and ambitions he had and the obvious love he had for drawing, food and his mother and family. She spoke about the loss she and his close friends have suffered, the shock of what happened and the pain she will face in the days and years ahead. She poses the question that many will be asking: *How can children behave like this, so completely violent and angry? What have the children been exposed to, so show such behaviour as this?* At the end of her statement she expresses the hope that the two of you get the help you need before you are released so that no other mother has to stand where she did to face the two of you again. The statement of Hashim, Kelyan's father, was read to the court. He expresses many similar thoughts to those of his wife. He too asks why his son's life was taken – what reason there could be and why words could not sort any issues rather than violence.

12. Many of us can only imagine the impact of grief on Kelyan’s father, mother, friends and family. Sitting here as a judge it is sadly an all too frequent event to see the senseless loss of yet another young life to the horrors of knife crime.

Previous convictions.

13. A, you are 16 years old. Your date of birth is 24th December 2008 and so you were just 10 days over your 16th birthday at the time of the murder. On 15th March 2024, for a robbery and the possession of a knife (a machete) on 4th February 2024, (about a year before this murder) you were made the subject of a referral order for 12 months. Whilst on bail for that matter, on 25th February 2024, you were again found to be in possession of a knife (a lock knife). That matter was also dealt with at the same time as the first. I note that at the time of the murder you were on bail for a drugs offence and under investigation in respect of two robberies.
14. B, you were born on 1st April 2009. You are also now aged 16 and were 15 as at the date of the murder. There are two previous convictions recorded against you. On 25th August 2023, for an offence of having a knife (a ‘Zombie’ knife) in a public place on 20th July 2023, you were made the subject of a referral order for 6 months. That offence was committed whilst you were on bail for another matter. On 12th December 2023, you were in possession of cannabis. After a plea of guilty, you were made the subject of an absolute discharge. At the time of this murder you were under investigation for other matters.

Sentencing provisions.

15. For murder, the only sentence must be a life sentence and where, as here, those sentenced are aged 18 or under at the date of the offence, the sentence is expressed as detention during His Majesty’s pleasure. I must set the minimum term that you will serve before you can first be considered for release. I make plain that I am not ordering that you are to be released at the end of that minimum term. Whether you will be released or not at that stage will be a matter for the Parole Board to consider. Only when the minimum term has been served can the Parole Board decide whether it is safe to release you or not. If the Board does release you, then you will remain on licence and liable to recall for the rest of your life.
16. Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020, has been amended by Parliament and most significantly by the provisions of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. I need to consider where this case falls within that schedule as amended.

17. The start point for sentence in a case such as this for those aged 18 and above would be one of 25 years on the basis of taking a knife to the scene intending to commit any offence, or have it available as a weapon and using the knife in committing the murder. For those aged 15 or 16 the start point is now one of 17 years. I note that in both pre-sentence reports the authors wrongly state the start point as one of 12 years.
18. In terms of aggravating features, in my judgment when one looks at the CCTV this was a murder with significant planning and with clear premeditation. Second, the victim was particularly vulnerable because of his age - 14 at the time of his death. Third, whilst the use of weapons to commit the killing is accounted for in the starting point, the weapons used in this case were particularly dangerous, being large machetes. Fourthly, there is the use of sustained and excessive force towards the victim – 27 blows were aimed towards him. Fifthly, there you both have previous convictions for possessing knives. Sixthly, in your case A, the offences were committed in breach of a referral order you were subject to. Seventhly, the offence was committed by a group; the deceased was outnumbered two to one. Eighthly, the offence was committed in public before members of the public. Finally, the disposal of evidence: B, you attempted to discard your knife in the Thames, and A, your weapon was not recovered.
19. In terms of mitigating factors, whilst age determines the start point, I need to consider the level of maturity. In this case it is very clear that your intentions were to kill and so no reduction will be made to reflect any lesser intent.
20. You pleaded guilty and credit will be given for those pleas. The level of credit cannot exceed one sixth of the appropriate minimum term.
21. There are lengthy pre-sentence reports. In your case A, the report speaks of your exposure to gang culture and to cannabis. I note that in February 2024, a National Referral Mechanism was completed and that a Conclusive Grounds decision was made in May 2024, accepting that to be a victim of modern slavery. You were identified as a victim of Child Criminal Exploitation within forced criminality. The report states: “*Child criminal exploitation is a complex form of abuse driven by a mix of individual vulnerabilities and environmental factors*”. The author of the pre-sentence report assesses that family experiences, school exclusion and substance use were all factors that contributed to your subsequent exploitation. The author adds: “*Furthermore, gangs often mimic family structures, offering protection, belonging and identity. For [A], sense of belonging was a key feature assessed in relation to his predisposition to negative peer association.*”

22. The report concludes by acknowledging that the offence is of the upmost seriousness and suggesting that your:

“...age, developmental maturity, history of trauma and exploitation must be weighted carefully. [A] is a child to first generation migrant parents, who were largely disconnected from the system by virtue of their initial legal status and continued inability to speak English. This impacted the way in which [A] was parented and how they understood the local pressures that were a daily reality for [A]. In addition to this, [A] has been an exploited child for a number of years prior to his appearance before the Court today. It is hoped that with time [A] can receive and respond to rehabilitative and restorative intervention.”

23. In your case B, I note what is set out in the report as to your involvement with drugs, drug dealing and the ‘Woolwich Dockyard’ gang. The report details concerns about your involvement with gang culture going back to 2021. The author sets out concerns on events going back to that period:

“In November of that year, he was located by police in Bedfordshire, an area where he has no known links kin or otherwise, travelling without a valid train ticket. While being escorted by officers, he absconded from the police vehicle leading to further suspicion around him being a criminally exploited child. In March 2024, [B] was again found in the Bedfordshire area, this time in possession of a large sum of cash and four burner phones, consistent with behaviour linked to county lines activity. Between April and August 2023, [B] came to the attention of the Police on four occasions. In all instances, [B] was found with drugs and large sums of money on his person, further exacerbating concerns around illegitimate activity and exploitation. From a developmental perspective, [B]’s early and sustained exposure to exploitation likely disrupted normative psychosocial development, particularly in areas related to identity formation, impulse control, and moral reasoning.”

24. At paragraph 2.9 I note that in July 2022, the author says that following an arrest for an incident whereby you threatened your family with a knife within the home, a National Referral Mechanism referral was submitted. They state:

“At the time of preparing this report we have had confirmation of a Conclusive Grounds decision supporting concerns around [B] being the victim of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). The grooming processes used in CCE typically involve a combination of psychological manipulation, inducement through material gain and

threats of violence. [B]’s offending behaviour reflects patterns observed in victims of CCE such as limited agency, blurred boundaries between victimhood and culpability, and actions taken under duress or perceived obligation.”

25. In terms of maturity I note what is set out at paragraph 3.10 as to age and developmental stage. The author’s view is that:

“[B] does present emotionally immature and impulsive due to underlying neurodevelopmental needs; the extent of which have been referenced in the psychological report cited throughout the young person’s assessment section. The concerns in relation to his early lived experiences, alongside negative peer influences and the trauma that [B] has been exposed to also cannot be discounted from the contextual narrative. [B]’s withdrawn stance and emotional numbing in both the commissioning and recollection of this offence is indicative of adaptations to chronic stress, coercive relationships and emotional neglect.”

26. In the conclusion to the report the author states, in similar terms to the report on A, that you are:

“.. a child to first generation immigrant parents who would have grappled with all of the struggle and hardship that comes with a family relocating to a new land with a system that would have been foreign to them at the time. The impact of disrupted employment opportunity and subsequent effect on the family’s financial stability would have also contributed to [B]’s vulnerability. Groomed and exploited by gangs from the age of 12, during his most vulnerable developmental years, with older peers exerting significant influence and persuasion over him, has played a critical role in his involvement in serious criminal activity. Additionally, [B] presents with undiagnosed neurodevelopmental needs, which have likely impacted his ability to fully understand and navigate situations, limiting his capacity to make safer choices. [B]’s background is marked by significant trauma stemming from adverse early childhood experiences. These unresolved issues have profoundly affected his emotional development and coping mechanisms, further compounding his vulnerability to negative influences and harmful behaviours.”

Mitigation.

27. A, on your behalf Mr Rutherford realistically sets out the position you are in. He refers to the matters in the PSR and character letters that I have read. He refers to the poignant nature of

the victim impact statements and the comments on violent youth crime. He says that the references reflect a different boy to the one seen on the CCTV. He says that the plea give some hope of a more positive future ahead.

28. B, in your case, as I observed to Mr Langley, some of the material provided in your case does not reflect the reality of the situation. In your case I have read the letter you have written and that of your brother. Mr Langley primarily focusses on the level of your maturity and invites the Court to make a significant allowance for it. He submits that being in custody has meant you being locked-up for many hours each day, but despite that, as the PSR shows, you have sought opportunities for education and training. Finally, he submits that early guilty pleas in cases such as this are rare, but it should be seen as a marker or regret and remorse.

Sentence.

29. As I have already stated, there will be life sentences in each of your cases. Taking as the appropriate start point for the minimum term 17 years, then balancing the very serious and significant aggravating factors identified and making some allowance for maturity, leads to an initial uplift to 22 years and then reduction down to 19 years. Then, allowing credit for plea, a minimum term of 15 years 10 months' (15 years 300 days). The days on remand number 190 and those days will be deducted from the minimum term. In each of your cases the sentence will be one of detention during His Majesty's pleasure with a minimum term of 15 years 110 days.
30. What that means is that before you will first be considered for parole there will be a period of 15 years' 110 days. If the information which I have been provided as to the days on remand proves to be inaccurate then the prosecution or defence must notify the court so that the case can be relisted to correct the calculation as soon as possible and in any event within 56 days.
31. When it comes to the minimum term that you will serve, I make plain that I am not ordering that you are to be released at the end of it. Whether you will be released or not at that stage will be a matter for the Parole Board to consider. Only when the minimum term has been served can the Parole Board decide whether it is safe to release you or not. If the Board does release you, then you will remain on licence and liable to recall for the rest of your life.
32. On counts 2 and 3 there will be concurrent determinate sentences. As you have previous convictions for similar offences there must be a sentence of custody. Here the appropriate

sentences are concurrent sentences on each of those counts of 12 months' detention. I order the forfeiture and destruction of the machete recovered.

33. If the statutory surcharge applies to your cases, then the appropriate orders can be drawn up.

Recorder of London
His Honour Judge Mark Lucraft KC
Central Criminal Court
Old Bailey
London EC4M 7EH
July 25th 2025.