

IN THE CROWN COURT AT COVENTRY

R v. DENG CHOL MAJEK

SENTENCING REMARKS

The Hon Mr Justice Soole

30 January 2026

Deng Chol Majek,

You have been found guilty of the murder of Rhiannon Whyte at Bescot Stadium railway station.

At about 11.20 p.m. on 20 October 2024, Rhiannon was on the station platform, waiting for her train home after her late shift as an employee at the nearby Park Inn hotel. You were a resident at the hotel. Having armed yourself with a Phillips head screwdriver, you had followed Rhiannon from the hotel to the station and down onto the platform, where she stood alone. You then immediately and repeatedly attacked her with the screwdriver, inflicting 23 puncture wounds, 19 of them to the head. With the greatest courage, Rhiannon had tried to defend herself against your frenzied and sustained brutality. She collapsed to the ground, where you left her. At the time of your attack Rhiannon had been on her mobile, talking to a friend. You took her phone, turned it off and calmly walked back in the direction from which you had come. As you crossed the footbridge over the Tame, you threw her mobile into the river. You did not immediately return to the hotel, but first took a long walk around Walsall, in the course of which you bought some beer. Following your return, the CCTV shows you dancing and laughing in the hotel car park, against the backcloth of blue flashing lights from the railway station.

Rhiannon was found by the crew of her intended train, which arrived shortly after the assault. Emergency services came quickly to the scene. Despite every best effort, Rhiannon died in hospital three days later.

The evidence against you, in particular from CCTV and DNA, was overwhelming. You continue to deny that you were the assailant. The Court is thus left with no explanation of what possessed you to murder a member of the hotel staff who, together with her colleagues, had been serving and helping you and your fellow residents.

The Court has heard the statements of Rhiannon's mother and one of her sisters. They speak in deeply moving terms of Rhiannon's wonderful character and qualities; and of the devastation which you have wrought to her close and loving family, across the generations and including her young son. The Court is only too conscious that no sentence can ever begin to meet their terrible loss.

For the purpose of establishing the appropriate sentencing regime and generally, it has been necessary to order an age assessment report. When in July 2024 you entered this country, you claimed you were born in Sudan in or about January 2006 and were thus 18. However, in the course of your long journey from Sudan, you had passed through Italy, Germany and France; and your identification papers from Germany recorded your date of birth as 1 January 1998. You said that the year was a mistake. Having read the comprehensive report by the two experienced assessors and its supporting material, I am sure you were over 21 at the dates of your conviction and the offence. I accept their conclusion that your present age is between 25 and 28. I consider that the greatest likelihood is that you were born in 1998, as the German documents attest. I therefore sentence you on the basis that you were aged 26 at the date of Rhiannon's murder.

For the offence of murder the law imposes a sentence of imprisonment for life.

The law then requires me to fix the minimum term which you must serve before you are eligible to be considered for release by the Parole Board.

It is most important that you and everyone concerned with this case should understand what that means. The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will automatically be released, but is the minimum time that you will spend in custody before your case can be considered by the Parole Board. It will be for the Parole

Board to say, at that time, whether or not you will be released. If the Board considers that it remains necessary for the protection of the public you will remain in custody. If and when you are released you will still be subject to licence; and this will remain the case for the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence were revoked, you would be recalled to prison to continue to serve your life sentence in custody.

For the purpose of deciding the minimum term I must first identify the appropriate starting point by reference to Schedule 21 of the Sentencing Code.

There is and can be no dispute about this. You brought a weapon, the screwdriver, to the scene and used it in the murder. I am sure that you brought it to the scene with the intent to murder Rhiannon. It follows that the starting point is a minimum term of 25 years.

Next I must identify and take account of any statutory or other aggravating and mitigating factors which may require that starting point to be adjusted.

I am satisfied that the following aggravating factors apply.

First, I am sure that the offence involved a significant degree of premeditation. The CCTV shows that for substantial parts of the evening of 20 October you had been in the reception area of the hotel and staring fixedly in the direction of the group of female employees, including Rhiannon, who were working there. Then, at the time of the end of Rhiannon's shift, you went outside by the main entrance. After Rhiannon had come out, you then followed her all the way to the station platform, armed with your weapon.

Secondly, the particularly vicious brutality of this sustained assault with your chosen weapon.

Thirdly, its commission against a woman, alone, late at night, in a public place.

Fourthly, your disposal of evidence with the intent of escaping detection. The CCTV evidence show you throwing Rhiannon's mobile into the river. It was later retrieved by a police diver. You evidently disposed of the screwdriver.

I turn to consideration of any statutory or other mitigating factors.

For this purpose, you have provided minimal assistance to the Court. To the author of the Pre-Sentence Report, you continued to deny that you were Rhiannon's assailant; showed no empathy for the victim; and provided a limited account of your life in Sudan before your departure. To the Consultant Psychiatrist who examined you for a report in March 2025, before your trial, you were unwilling to discuss your past medical history and very guarded in what you said. For the age assessment process, you refused consent for disclosure of your medical records. During the two age assessment interviews you then refused to answer many questions, including those about events in Sudan. Your refusals were typically preceded by the words 'Thank you for the question'. The authors of the report described your provision of information as one of 'strategic selectivity'. They observed that throughout the 4 hours of the interviews your posture and demeanour were confident, controlled, composed and relaxed. In the result, you have provided the Court with no explanation for your conduct nor any reliable basis to consider any suggested mitigating factors.

I see no basis for the statutory mitigating factor which arises where the intent was to cause serious bodily harm, rather than to kill. Having regard to every aspect of your conduct, before during and after the assault on Rhiannon, I am sure that your intent was to kill.

In my judgment your age and level of maturity provide no mitigation. The evidence shows a level of maturity which is consistent with your true age; and indeed a chilling composure in every aspect of your behaviour.

Your Counsel then points to the agreed fact that you have no previous convictions in this or any country; to your accounts of your life in Sudan and consequent departure from that country; to an aspect of your physical health which (as I accept) is established; to suggested mental ill-health; to limits on your command of English; and

to the prospect that your time in prison may be more onerous than for others. In my judgment your accounts at the trial and otherwise about your personal circumstances in Sudan are unreliable. You have refused consent in respect of medical records and failed to engage with the consultant psychiatrist. I have no doubt that your English is better than you suggest. In any event, if all these matters were established by reliable evidence, they provide no mitigation whatsoever for what you have done. In your case, there are no mitigating factors.

For Count 2, the associated and overlapping offence of possession of an offensive weapon, no separate penalty will be imposed.

The surcharge provisions apply and the Order will be drawn accordingly.

Deng Chol Majek

On the Count of murder, and as the law requires, the sentence is imprisonment for life.

I turn to the minimum sentence which you must serve in custody before you may apply to the Parole Board to be considered for release.

Having regard to all the matters to which I have referred, I set that minimum term at 29 years. From this must be deducted the 466 days you have spent on remand in custody. This means that the minimum term you will serve before you can be considered for release is 27 years and 264 days.