

UK: Stansted 15 appeal verdict a 'good day for justice'



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Activists peacefully attempted to prevent the deportation of 60 people at Stansted Airport in 2017

'The Stansted 15 will take their place in the history books as human rights defenders who bravely brought injustices perpetrated by the state into the light' – Kate Allen

Responding to news that the Stansted 15's High Court appeal has been successful, Kate Allen, Amnesty International UK's Director, said:

"The Stansted 15 will take their place in the history books as human rights defenders who bravely brought injustices perpetrated by the state into the light.

"This case should never have been brought, the charges were disproportionate to the actions of the group and there must be lessons learnt for how we treat human rights defenders in this country."

The "Stansted 15" were tried in relation to their attempt to prevent the deportation of a group of people at Stansted Airport in 2017. The 15 human rights defenders took non-violent direct action to prevent the deportation of 60 people on a charter flight bound for Ghana and Nigeria.

Their actions - which at no point harmed anyone - prevented the flight from leaving. Of the 60 individuals due to have been deported, at least four have since been granted permission to remain in the UK, with others still pursuing their claims.

Initially, the Stansted 15 were charged with aggravated

trespass, but four months later this was changed to “endangering safety at aerodromes” - a serious terrorism-related charge which has a maximum penalty of a life sentence.

Ahead of the trial, which began at Chelmsford Crown Court in 2018, Amnesty wrote to the Director of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Attorney General calling for the “endangering safety at aerodromes” charge to be dropped, expressing concern that it was excessive, and may even have been brought to discourage other activists from taking non-violent direct action in defence of human rights. Amnesty attended the trial proceedings daily.

In February 2019, three of the group were given suspended jail sentences, and the other 12 were handed community orders.

In November last year the activists began an appeal to challenge their convictions made under terrorism laws.

Nearly 12,000 Amnesty supporters have sent the Stansted 15 messages of solidarity.

The case of the Stansted 15 followed a pattern across Europe of volunteers acting for migrants and people seeking refuge being harassed, intimidated, and criminalised for their acts of solidarity.

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