



The Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP
Secretary of State for Justice
By Email

13th August 2024

Dear Shabana,

I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the recent trial and sentencing of Louise Lancaster, Lucia Whittaker de Abreu, Cressida Gethin, Daniel Shaw, and Roger Hallam, which concluded at Southwark Crown Court. I have received a significant amount of correspondence from concerned constituents about this matter, reflecting widespread apprehension about the implications for peaceful protest and our obligations under international treaties.

The case, which saw the defendants convicted of conspiring to block M25 traffic, has raised serious questions about the proportionality and fairness of their treatment. It is unacceptable that these protesters, who were non-violently acting to protect people and planet, have been given longer sentences than perpetrators of robbery, drug crime, and various forms of violence - especially when prisons are at a bursting point. And it is absurd that we are so severely punishing climate protesters whilst letting oil and gas giants completely off the hook for the hugely significant damage they are doing to the planet.

The recently enacted Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023, both major reasons why the judge handed down such long sentences, must be repealed. These legislative changes are draconian, oppressive, and undermine the fundamental right to the right to protest and free expression.

In addition, Judge Hehir's intention to impose lengthy prison sentences, potentially exceeding those typically given for serious crimes, without any pre-sentencing reports for the defendants—particularly Daniel Shaw, who was sectioned under the Mental Health Act—raises significant concerns about the fairness of the proceedings. Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention who attended the trial, [set out allegations of persecution, penalization and harassment](#), all violations of the UK's binding obligations under the convention, in March 2024. The United Kingdom should have provided a substantive response within sixty days - it failed to do so and still hasn't responded.

Given the gravity of these concerns, I urge you to take immediate and decisive action to address the following issues:

1. Ensure that the sentences imposed are proportionate and reflect the non-violent nature of the protests.
2. Provide a substantive response to Michel Forst's concerns and ensure that the UK adheres to its obligations under the Aarhus Convention. This includes addressing any systemic issues related to the treatment of environmental defenders.



Ellie Chowns MP
Member of Parliament for North Herefordshire
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

3. Repeal the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 on the right to peaceful protest, which both unduly restrict democratic freedoms and disproportionately penalise non-violent climate activists.

It is essential that the UK government demonstrates a commitment to human rights, justice, and environmental protection by addressing these issues urgently and comprehensively. I trust that you will give these matters the attention they deserve and take appropriate action to uphold the principles of justice and international cooperation.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E Chowns'.

Ellie Chowns MP, North Herefordshire.