# Boris Johnson criticises childminder’s jail sentence over Southport stabbing tweet



Boris Johnson has publicly criticised the sentencing of a childminder who was jailed over a social media post related to the Southport stabbings, describing the 31-month prison term as damaging to the UK's international reputation on freedom of expression.

Lucy Connolly, aged 42 and married to a Conservative councillor, was given a sentence of two years and seven months in October after pleading guilty to publishing threatening or abusive material with intent to stir up racial hatred. The conviction stemmed from a tweet she published on 29 July last year in the aftermath of a devastating attack in Southport, Merseyside, where Axel Rudakubana stabbed 13 people at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class. Among the victims were eight children, three of whom tragically died.

Shortly after the attack, false rumours circulated on social media claiming that Rudakubana was an illegal migrant. In reality, he was born in Cardiff to Rwandan immigrant parents. Connolly's tweet reflected this misinformation; she posted a message calling for "mass deportation" and expressed violent sentiments toward hotels housing asylum seekers and the government itself. She also said, "If that makes me racist so be it." Although she deleted the post within four hours of publication, it had already been viewed by 310,000 people.

The judge in Connolly’s case drew a direct connection between her tweet and the riots that followed the stabbings, during which hotels housing asylum seekers were targeted by arsonists across Britain. Connolly, a mother and childminder from Northampton with no previous convictions, was sentenced accordingly.

Speaking to the Daily Mail, Mr Johnson criticised the severity of the sentence, suggesting it could undermine Britain’s standing as a country that values free speech. He said, "This has caused amazement among our friends and allies – notably in America where they have constitutional protections for free speech. And it has caused glee among the despots and tyrants of the world. Putin can point to this and other such cases and claim that you are far more likely to be arrested in the UK for what you write on social media than you are in Russia."

He added that while Putin’s regime is known for more extreme suppressions, the UK’s approach may inadvertently provide a "propaganda gift to our enemies." Johnson further described Connolly’s tweet as "disgusting" and "vile" but emphasised the broader implications of imprisoning someone for a social media post that was swiftly taken down.

This incident continues to prompt discussions regarding the balance between combating hate speech and protecting freedom of expression within the UK legal framework, especially in the context of social media communications.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/10/18/boris-johnson-questions-jail-sentence-tory-councillor-wife/> - Corroborates Boris Johnson's criticism of Lucy Connolly's 31-month sentence and mentions her social media post's connection to the Southport stabbings.
2. <https://dustymasterson.substack.com/p/free-speech-the-story-of-lucy-connolly> - Details the judge's assertion that Connolly's tweet contributed to post-Southport riots and highlights legal criticism of the sentencing severity.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/10/18/boris-johnson-questions-jail-sentence-tory-councillor-wife/> - Confirms Connolly's identity as a childminder married to a Tory councillor, her guilty plea, and the tweet's content (including 'mass deportation' and violent sentiments).
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/10/18/boris-johnson-questions-jail-sentence-tory-councillor-wife/> - Verifies the timing of Connolly's tweet (hours after the Southport attack) and its subsequent deletion within four hours.
5. <https://dustymasterson.substack.com/p/free-speech-the-story-of-lucy-connolly> - Supports claims about Connolly's personal circumstances (mother, first-time offender) and the backlash against her disproportionate sentencing from legal experts.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/10/18/boris-johnson-questions-jail-sentence-tory-councillor-wife/> - Aligns with Boris Johnson's argument that the sentence damages UK's free speech reputation internationally, including his specific remarks about Putin's potential exploitation.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14600783/boris-johnson-jailing-mum-riot-damages-UK-reputation.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data