

## ISLAMIST TERRORISM

# Brusthom Ziamani (AKA Mujahid Abdullah Shaheed Karim)<sup>1</sup>

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**Gender:** Male

**Charge:** Engaging in conduct in preparation for acts of terrorism [Sec 5(1) Terrorism Act 2006] [one count]<sup>2</sup>

**Date of arrest:** 19 August 2014<sup>3</sup>

**Date of charge:** 21 August 2014<sup>4</sup>

**Age at time of charge:** 19<sup>5</sup>

**Plea:** Not guilty<sup>6</sup>

**Date of conviction:** 19 February 2015<sup>7</sup>

**Age at time of conviction:** 19<sup>8</sup>

**Date of sentence:** 20 March 2015<sup>9</sup>

**Sentence:** 22 years; 5-year extended licence period;<sup>10</sup> 30-year Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 notification period<sup>11</sup>

**Time spent on remand:** 211 days<sup>12</sup>

**Sentencing court:** Central Criminal Court<sup>13</sup>

**Appeal:** Yes [appeal against sentence successful, Court of Appeal, 17 May 2016 – substituted sentence: 19 years; 5-year extended licence period; 30-year Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 notification period]<sup>14</sup>

**Target:** Military – soldier [primary]; Targeted civilian – police officer, government official or authority figure [secondary]<sup>15</sup>

**Known links to proscribed terrorist organisations:** Yes [AM]<sup>16</sup>

**Network:** Individual Actor; al-Muhajiroun [AM]<sup>17</sup>

**Role:** Attack Planner – beheading;<sup>18</sup> IS-inspired<sup>19</sup>

**Known associates:** Michael Adebolajo [Lee Rigby murder – AM];<sup>20</sup> Mizanur Rahman [convictions for inciting racial hatred, soliciting to murder and inviting support of a proscribed terrorist organisation, 2006, 2007 & 2016 – AM];<sup>21</sup> Humza Ali [conviction for preparing for acts of terrorism, 2016]<sup>22</sup>

**Known terrorist training:** No

**Known combat experience:** No

**Nationality:** British<sup>23</sup>

**Ancestry:** British-Congolese<sup>24</sup>

**Place of residence:** No fixed address; staying at Warner Road, Camberwell, London Borough of Southwark, Central London [March 2014–arrest]<sup>25</sup>

**Born in the UK:** Yes [b. London;<sup>26</sup> r. Camberwell<sup>27</sup>] [DOB 18 August 1995]<sup>28</sup>

**Family/living circumstances:** Living with friend [AM]; formerly homeless after becoming estranged from family in March 2014<sup>29</sup>

**Occupation:** Unemployed<sup>30</sup>

**Education:** Studied further education course in motor mechanics and GCSEs, Harris Academy Peckham, Southwark [left without qualifications]<sup>31</sup>

**Known religious convert:** Yes [from Jehovah's Witnesses, March 2014–April 2014]<sup>32</sup>

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**Known to authorities:** Yes [no previous convictions; involved in gang-related criminal activities (robberies, fighting, drug-dealing, prostitutes and fraud);<sup>33</sup> arrested and released on bail on suspicion of preparing for terrorism (during an unrelated search of the flat he was staying at), 27–28 June 2014;<sup>34</sup> declined to engage with Prevent on three subsequent occasions prior to arrest<sup>35</sup>]

**Status:** In detention [parole eligibility date, 21 April 2029; automatic release date, 21 August 2036; community licence, 21 August 2041]

### Notes

Brusthom Ziamani was convicted in February 2015 of preparing for acts of terrorism, namely the beheading of a British soldier, inspired by the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in May 2013 and in stated support of Islamic State (IS).<sup>36</sup>

On 19 August 2014, Ziamani was stopped by the police in East London and found to be carrying a hammer, a 12-inch knife and an Islamic flag (the black flag bearing the *shahada*, or Islamic declaration of faith, appropriated by Islamist organisations).<sup>37</sup> The trial judge later concluded that had he not been stopped he would have undoubtedly carried out an attack on a soldier or another authority figure, citing the testimonies of Ziamani's ex-girlfriend and a prison officer to whom he disclosed while in detention.<sup>38</sup>

Ziamani's ex-girlfriend reported that he had previously expressed his desire to become a martyr; after sending her an abusive WhatsApp message he had contacted her on 18 August 2014 to make amends in case he died; and on the morning of his intended attack, he had gone to her home and shown her the hammer and knife in his bag, telling her that he and “the brothers” were planning an attack on “soldiers and government people”.<sup>39</sup> Ziamani also told a prison officer that Rigby's murder had been “for the benefit of all Muslims” and that, when arrested, he had been on his way to an army barracks in order to behead a soldier and get a photograph of him holding the severed head.<sup>40</sup> Ziamani further told the officer that he had known one of Rigby's murders, Michael Adebolajo, and claimed that they had handed out leaflets in Greenwich together in 2013.<sup>41</sup>

Ziamani was found guilty after trial of an inchoate offence, that of having decided to commit a terrorist act, of having prepared for it and of having been apprehended while seeking a target.<sup>42</sup> The preparatory acts that formed the basis of his conviction were: research into cadet and army bases in south east London and online searches of ‘The Souls Journey after Death in Islam’ and ‘Jannah’ (‘Paradise’), evidenced by his mobile phone search history; encouragement of others to engage in *jihad* through his pro-jihadist Facebook posts; a handwritten letter of intent that read, “British soldiers’ heads will be removed”; “making peace” with his ex-girlfriend prior to the attack; and arming himself in public.<sup>43</sup>

In January 2015, the director general of the Security Service included Ziamani's as among three planned attacks which the Security Service had stopped in recent months that would otherwise have resulted in death. Considered among the most serious terrorism plots since the escalation of the conflict in Syria and the emergence of IS, counter-terrorism police highlighted the speed with which Ziamani appeared to have been radicalised and then developed an extremist, violent mind-set over a series of months.<sup>44</sup> On 20 March 2015, Ziamani was sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment with a five-year extended licence period.<sup>45</sup>

Ziamani first came to the attention of the authorities on 27 June 2014 when police executed a search warrant at the apartment where he had been living on suspicion of unlawful subletting.<sup>46</sup> During the search, officers found the letter upon which his conviction is partly based. Addressed to Ziamani's parents, the letter outlined his intention to “wage war against the British government”, and read: “we should do a 9/11 and a 7/7 and Woolwich all in one day every day for 8 years”. As well as military targets, Ziamani wrote that Shia Muslims, homosexuals and non-Muslims should be killed, further stating: “do not mix with Christians and Jews and non-believers. Kill them all no pity ... kuffar [‘non-believers’]”.<sup>47</sup> Ziamani asked to be referred to as ‘Mujahid Karim’, *mujahid* meaning fighter, which was the name he used on his Facebook account.<sup>48</sup> After being released on police bail, he continued to post extremist content online.<sup>49</sup> He declined to engage with police officers working as part of the counter-radicalisation programme Prevent who expressed concerns that he may be vulnerable to extremism or radicalisation,<sup>50</sup> reportedly telling one officer that it was already “too late”.<sup>51</sup>

London-born Ziamani was raised a Jehovah's Witness and as a child would regularly evangelise with his Congolese parents.<sup>52</sup> As an adolescent he became involved with petty crime, including credit card theft (used to pay for prostitutes) as well as gang-related robberies and drug-dealing (though he had no previous convictions).<sup>53</sup> At trial, Ziamani said that he initially became interested in Islam through rap music.<sup>54</sup> Ziamani converted in March or April 2014 and began attending Camberwell Mosque, where he slept occasionally. He became estranged from his parents, with conflicting accounts as to whether this was the result of his conversion or his then new relationship.<sup>55</sup>

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Ziamani began living with a friend in a flat that was also a meeting place for the proscribed terrorist group al-Muhajiroun, with whom he quickly became involved.<sup>56</sup> It was at this point that he began posting extremist content on Facebook and started attending al-Muhajiroun meetings in the basement of a *halal* (‘permissible’) sweet shop in Whitechapel owned by the brother of al-Muhajiroun leader Anjem Choudary,<sup>57</sup> convicted of inviting support for IS in July 2016.<sup>58</sup> In May 2014, Ziamani was photographed attending an al-Muhajiroun protest,<sup>59</sup> and by the time of his arrest had reportedly become friends Mizanur Rahman,<sup>60</sup> a leading member of al-Muhajiroun convicted alongside Choudary. In July 2014, Ziamani distributed leaflets titled ‘Education under the Shari’ah’ alongside Humza Ali. Ali was part of a Birmingham-based network of IS supporters and, in December 2016, was convicted of preparing for acts of terrorism in relation to attempted travel to Syria and disseminating terrorist publications.<sup>61</sup>

In May 2016, Ziamani successfully appealed his sentence, which was reduced to 19 years on the basis of his youth.<sup>62</sup>

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30 ‘UK teen jailed for 22 years in extremist plot to kill soldier’, *CNN*, 20 March 2015, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/20/europe/uk-terror-ziamani-sentenced/>, last visited: 28 October 2016.

31 “‘British soldiers’ heads will be removed... you cannot beat the Muslims”: Letter to parents from teenager convicted of Islamic terror plot which revealed his hopes of killing “every gay, every Shia””, *Daily Mail*, 19 February 2015.

32 R v Kahar & Ors [2016] EWCA Crim 568, 17 May 2016, paras. 70–71; ‘Soldier beheading plot: MI5 concerned over the speed with which Brusthom Ziamani was radicalised’, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 2016.

33 R v Kahar & Ors [2016] EWCA Crim 568, 17 May 2016, para. 69; ‘Teenage jihadi guilty of plot to behead soldier was radicalised by hate preacher in just 12 WEEKS – and tried to convert his girlfriend who liked to wear short dresses and heels’, *Daily Mail*, 19 February 2015, available at: [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2960372/Teenage-jihadi-guilty-plot-behead-soldier-radicalised-hate-preacher-just-12-weeks.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2960372/Teenage-jihadi-guilty-plot-behead-soldier-radicalised-hate-preacher-just-12-weeks.html), last visited: 3 October 2016.

34 R v Kahar & Ors [2016] EWCA Crim 568, 17 May 2016, paras. 72–75.

35 *ibid.*, para. 76.

36 Indictment in the Central Criminal Court, *The Queen v Brusthom Ziamani*; “‘British soldiers’ heads will be removed... you cannot beat the Muslims”: Letter to parents from teenager convicted of Islamic terror plot which revealed his hopes of killing “every gay, every Shia””, *Daily Mail*, 19 February 2015.

37 ‘Soldier beheading plan teenager Brusthom Ziamani jailed’, *BBC News*, 20 March 2015; R v Kahar & Ors [2016] EWCA Crim 568, 17 May 2016, para. 78; ‘Teenage jihadi guilty of plot to behead soldier was radicalised by hate preacher in just 12 WEEKS – and tried to convert his girlfriend who liked to wear short dresses and heels’, *Daily Mail*, 19 February 2015.

38 R v Brusthom Ziamani, Sentencing remarks of HHJ Pontius, Central Criminal Court, 20 March 2015, p. 1.

39 R v Kahar & Ors [2016] EWCA Crim 568, 17 May 2016, para. 78.

40 *ibid.*, para. 79.

41 ‘Brusthom Ziamani “said he knew Lee Rigby killer Michael Adebolajo”’, *BBC News*, 10 February 2015.

42 R v Brusthom Ziamani, Sentencing remarks of HHJ Pontius, Central Criminal Court, 20 March 2015, p. 2.

43 Indictment in the Central Criminal Court, *The Queen v Brusthom Ziamani*; R v Kahar & Ors [2016] EWCA Crim 568, 17 May 2016, paras. 72–73, 75 & 82.

44 “‘British soldiers’ heads will be removed... you cannot beat the Muslims”: Letter to parents from teenager convicted of Islamic terror plot which revealed his hopes of killing “every gay, every Shia””, *Daily Mail*, 19 February 2015.

45 R v Kahar & Ors [2016] EWCA Crim 568, 17 May 2016, para. 67.

46 *ibid.*, para. 72; “‘British soldiers’ heads will be removed... you cannot beat the Muslims”: Letter to parents from teenager convicted of Islamic terror plot which revealed his hopes of killing “every gay, every Shia””, *Daily Mail*, 19 February 2015.

47 *ibid.*

48 R v Kahar & Ors [2016] EWCA Crim 568, 17 May 2016, para. 74.

49 *ibid.*, para. 75.

50 *ibid.*, para. 76.

51 R v Brusthom Ziamani Sentencing Remarks of His Honour Judge Pontius QC, 20 March 2015, p. 4.

52 ‘London teenager Ziamani guilty of plot to behead soldier’, *Channel 4 News*, 19 February 2015, available at: [www.channel4.com/news/brusthom-ziamani-guilty-behead-soldier-london-teenager](http://www.channel4.com/news/brusthom-ziamani-guilty-behead-soldier-london-teenager), last visited: 28 October 2016.

53 ‘Soldier beheading plot: MI5 concerned over the speed with which Brusthom Ziamani was radicalised’, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 2015; ‘Teenage jihadi guilty of plot to behead soldier was radicalised by hate preacher in just 12 WEEKS – and tried to convert his girlfriend who liked to wear short dresses and heels’, *Daily Mail*, 19 February 2015.

54 ‘Soldier beheading plot: MI5 concerned over the speed with which Brusthom Ziamani was radicalised’, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 2015.

55 *ibid.*; R v Kahar & Ors [2016] EWCA Crim 568, 17 May 2016, paras. 70–71.

56 *ibid.*

57 ‘Teenager who “idolised” Lee Rigby killers guilty of planning to behead British soldier’, *Daily Express*, 19 February 2015; ‘Revealed: “Sweet shop” jihadi boss is the elder brother of jailed hate preacher Anjem Choudary’, *Daily Mail*, 4 September 2016, available at: [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3772778/Sweet-shop-jihadi-boss-elder-brother-jailed-hate-preacher-Anjem-Choudary.html#ixzz4PREURvTB](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3772778/Sweet-shop-jihadi-boss-elder-brother-jailed-hate-preacher-Anjem-Choudary.html#ixzz4PREURvTB), last visited: 23 October 2016.

58 ‘Radical cleric Anjem Choudary guilty of inviting IS support’, *BBC News*, 16 August 2016, available at: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37098751](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37098751), last visited: 23 August 2016.

59 ‘Brusthom Ziamani found guilty of plotting to behead British soldier’, *Independent*, 19 February 2015.

60 “‘British soldiers’ heads will be removed... you cannot beat the Muslims”: Letter to parents from teenager convicted of Islamic terror plot which revealed his hopes of killing “every gay, every Shia””, *Daily Mail*, 19 February 2015.

61 ‘Man convicted after training for IS at Paintball centre’, *ITV News*, 15 December 2016.

62 R v Kahar & Ors [2016] EWCA Crim 568, 17 May 2016, para. 86–87.