

Beat: News

AMANDA KNOX CONVICTION OVERTURNED BY HIGH COURT

DECISION ANNOUNCED IN ROME

Milan, Italy, 30.03.2015, 15:24 Time

USPA NEWS - In a final, stunning ruling, Italy's highest court on Friday overturned the convictions of American Amanda Knox and her former Italian boyfriend in the sensational murder case of Knox's British roommate.

The six judges of the Court of Cassation announced their decision about 10:30 p.m. in Rome (5:30 p.m. ET). They began deliberating at noon after closing arguments by a lawyer for Raffaele Sollecito, Knox's boyfriend when 21-year-old Meredith Kercher was stabbed to death in late 2007.

"I am tremendously relieved and grateful for the decision of the Supreme Court of Italy," the 27-year-old Knox said in a statement from her home in Seattle. "The knowledge of my innocence has given me strength in the darkest times of this ordeal."

The ruling, which struck down last year's guilty verdicts from a Florence appeals court, brings the eight-year case to a close. The judges concluded that the evidence did not support a conviction, and they declined to order another trial. Their reasoning will be released within 90 days.

Knox and Sollecito had served four years in Italian prisons before a lower court overturned their convictions and set them free in 2011. But the Cassation Court reversed that decision in 2013 and sent the case to the lower Florence court.

Knox has consistently maintained her innocence and did not return to Italy for the final hearing.

Her Italian lawyer, Carlo Dalla Vedova, said she was "very worried" in the days before the ruling, and vowed to never willingly return to Italy if the conviction was upheld.

Sollecito's lawyer made a final appeal to the court Friday, saying there were "colossal" errors in the Florence appeals court verdict. In her two-hour argument, Giulia Bongiorno compared Sollecito to Forrest Gump, the naive, dim-witted-but-earnest fictional hero of the book and 1994 movie starring Tom Hanks.

"He is an innocent who became wrapped up in spectacular and gigantic events that, like Forrest Gump, he did not fully realize," she said, saying her client was "was watching cartoons" at home when Kercher was killed.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-3695/amanda-knox-conviction-overturned-by-high-court.html>

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V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDSIV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): David Franciamore

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619