Sexual assault: Harvey Weinstein sentenced to 23 years in prison

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Disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison by a New York judge on Wednesday for rape and sexual assault in a landmark case for the #MeToo movement.  
  
Justice James Burke ignored the pleas of Weinstein’s defence team to give their client the minimum of five years behind bars, issuing a heavy sentence close to the maximum 29 years allowed.  
  
Earlier Weinstein told the court he was “totally confused” about what was happening.  
  
“I’m worried about this country,” he said, adding that his “empathy” had increased in the three years since accusations against him ignited the #MeToo global reckoning against men abusing positions of power.  
  
The sentencing capped a sensational downfall for the once-powerful 67-year-old, who lost much of his personal fortune estimated at $150 million as he became a pariah in the entertainment industry.  
  
Nearly 90 women, including Angelina Jolie and Salma Hayek, have come forward alleging 40 years of vile predatory behaviour by the Oscar-winning producer of “Shakespeare in Love” and numerous other critical and box office hits.  
  
The Silence Breakers — a group of 24 Weinstein accusers that included Ashley Judd, Lauren Sivan, Rosanna Arquette and Rose McGowan — said in a statement circulated to US entertainment media Weinstein’s legacy would always be that he was a convicted rapist.  
  
“He is going to jail — but no amount of jail time will repair the lives he ruined, the careers he destroyed, or the damage he has caused,” they said.  
  
Weinstein was brought from the notorious Rikers Island jail into the Manhattan criminal court in a wheelchair shortly before 9:30 am (1330 GMT) to learn his fate.  
  
– ‘No longer hiding’ –  
  
He was found guilty of a criminal sexual act in the first degree and rape in the third degree on February 24, in a verdict hailed by the #MeToo movement.  
  
Seven men and five women convicted him of raping ex-actress Jessica Mann in 2013 and of forcibly performing oral sex on former production assistant Mimi Haleyi in 2006.  
  
Mann, 34, and Haleyi, 42, delivered powerful victim impact statements in court.  
  
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Haleyi said being attacked by Weinstein had “diminished my confidence and faith in people.”  
  
Mann said his conviction had given her the strength to rebuild her life.  
  
“My monsters are no longer hiding in my closet,” she told the court.  
  
Weinstein appeared confident during the trial, laughing and smiling for journalists as he shuffled into and out of court every day using a walking frame following back surgery.  
  
The producer — famous for his hard-nosed approach to work and Oscars campaigns — was cleared of the most serious charges of predatory sexual assault, as well as rape in the first degree.  
  
Prosecutors called on Burke to issue a lengthy jail term, saying Weinstein engaged in a “lifetime of abuse” and had shown “a total lack of remorse” for his actions.  
  
In a pre-sentencing letter, the prosecution asked the judge to consider 36 other sexual abuse and harassment allegations against Weinstein dating back to the 1970s that were not part of the trial.  
  
“He got drunk on the power,” lead prosecutor Joan Illuzzi-Orbon told the court.  
  
“He held all cards and played them at his will,” she added.  
  
Weinstein’s team suggested Burke should take into account the achievements of a man whose films received more than 300 Oscar nominations and 81 statuettes.  
  
“His life story, his accomplishments, and struggles are simply remarkable and should not be disregarded in total because of the jury’s verdict,” the lawyers wrote in a pre-sentencing memo.  
  
(AFP)