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Man who intentionally drove his truck into a Muslim family, killing 4, gets life sentence in Canada



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LONDON, Ontario (AP) — A man found guilty of using his pickup truck to kill four members of a Muslim family was sentenced Thursday to life in prison as a Canadian judge ruled that the actions of the admitted white nationalist amounted to terrorism.

Nathaniel Veltman has also been sentenced to a concurrent life sentence for the attempted murder of a boy who survived the 2021 attack.

Veltman, 23, [was found guilty](#) in November of four counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder for hitting the Afzaal family with his truck while they were out for a walk.

Prosecutors argued that Veltman purposely ran his truck into the Afzaal family while they were out for a walk on June 6, 2021, to intimidate Muslims into leaving Canada. The defense sought to show he wasn't criminally liable saying he had mental health problems.

Justice Renee Pomerance, who presided over the trial, delivered her sentencing decision to a packed London, Ontario, courtroom on Thursday. Adults found guilty of first-degree murder in Canada face an automatic life sentence with no chance of parole for 25 years.

The case was the first time Canada's terrorism laws were put before a jury in a first-degree murder trial.

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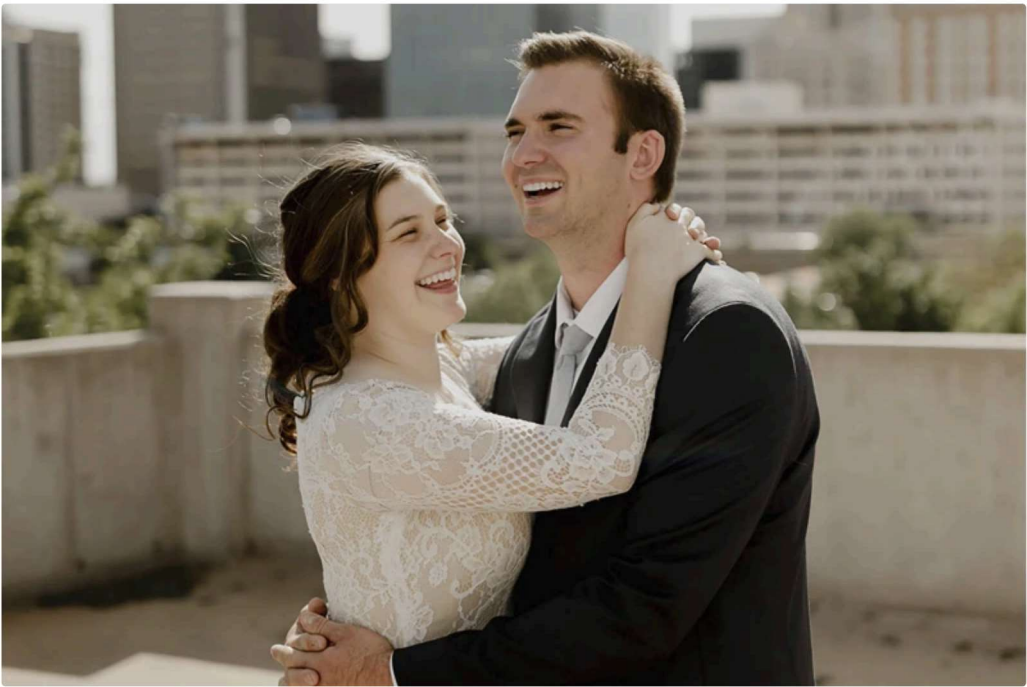
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In delivering her sentencing decision, Pomerance ruled that Veltman's actions constituted terrorism and said the brutality of the crime called for the imposition of the strictest penalty known to Canadian law.

"The offender did not know the victims. He had never met them. He killed them because they were Muslim," she said. "It is an inescapable conclusion that the offender committed a terrorist act. One might go so far as to characterize this as a textbook example of terrorist motive and intent."

Members of the Afzaal family were seen crying and nodding as Pomerance delivered her findings. Some later hugged each other after the judge left the courtroom.

"There is white supremacy in Canada. It is a threat. It is terrorism," said Ali Islam, an Afzaal family member.

Veltman was convicted of killing 46-year-old Salman Afzaal; his 44-year-old wife, Madiha Salman; their 15-year-old daughter, Yumna; and her 74-year-old grandmother, Talat Afzaal. The couple's 9-year-old son was seriously hurt but survived.

"The terrorism designation acknowledges the hate that fueled this," Tabinda Bukhari, Madiha's mother, said in statement in front of the courthouse. "But this hate didn't exist in a vacuum. It thrived in the whispers, the prejudices, the normalized fear of the other. All of these played their part in the tragedy that unfolded."

Bukhari said hate needs to be confronted and bridges of solidarity need to be built with other communities and faiths.

Prosecutors had argued Veltman was a white supremacist with a plan to commit violence, while the defense argued his actions shouldn't be considered terrorism because he kept his beliefs to himself.

Pomerance said Veltman was "a voracious consumer of extremist right-wing internet content" who became inspired by other mass killers.

She described him as believing "in the superiority of the white race, and the related aspiration for an all white society."

"In his statement to police, the offender made it clear that he wanted the world to know what he had done and why he had done it. This was part of a plan," the judge said.

"He wanted it to intimidate the Muslim community. He wanted to follow in the footsteps of other mass killers, and he wanted to inspire others to commit murderous acts."

During the trial, Veltman testified he had been considering using his pickup truck to carry out an attack and felt an "urge" to hit the Afzaal family after seeing them walking on a sidewalk. He said he knew they were Muslims from the clothes they were wearing and he noticed the man in the group had a beard.

The jury also watched video of Veltman telling a detective his attack had been motivated by white nationalist beliefs, and heard he wrote a manifesto where he described himself as a white supremacist in the weeks before the attack.

At a sentencing hearing last month, Veltman apologized for the pain he had caused but that apology was promptly rejected by the victims' family outside of court as "strategic words coming from a killer after he is convicted."

Christopher Hicks, Veltman's lawyer, said they haven't decided whether to appeal.