

Statement made on behalf of the Claimant
Witness: Florim Gashi
Date of Statement: 21 September 2005

Court of Appeal Reference: A2/2005/1093
IN THE COURT OF APPEAL (CIVIL DIVISION)
ON APPEAL FROM THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION

Lower Court Reference:
Claim No. HQ03X03360

ALIN TURCU

Claimant/ Appellant

- and -

NEWS GROUP NEWSPAPERS LIMITED

Defendant/ Respondent

WITNESS STATEMENT OF FLORIM GASHI

I, Florim Gashi WILL SAY as follows.

1. I make this witness statement in support of the Claimant's appeal against the judgment of Mr Justice Eady (which I have read). The purpose of this statement is to deny that there was ever any plot to kidnap Victoria Beckham and to explain a number of conversations and meetings relied on by the News of the World as evidence of such a plot.
2. I met the Claimant in October 2002 a few weeks before the article was published. I had met Jay Sorin ("Jay") when selling a car. Jay is Romanian. Through Jay I met Luli Krifsha ("Luli"). Luli is Albanian. I am from Kosovo and my first language is Albanian. Through Luli I met Joe Rivas ("Joe"). Joe had lived in Luli's flat and they were friends. I was introduced to Adrian Pasareanu ("Adrian") by Jay in October 2002. Jay was going out with Adrian's sister. Adrian was a Romanian doctor who had just arrived in the country to qualify as an NHS doctor. He appeared in need of money, I think to fund his studies. He was living in the Claimant's flat which was how I came to meet the Claimant. The Claimant and Adrian are both Romanian. Unlike the others the Claimant was working full-time, he was younger than them and I spent less time with him. He had been friendly with Jay, but it seemed that there had been a falling out between them.



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3. At this time I was supplying stories to Mazher Mahmood ("Maz") in return for cash payments. These stories generally involved people being encouraged to commit crimes, which would be captured on tape. I worked with Maz's cousin, Mahmood Quereshi (known as "Jaws"). Jaws is a large man who has been in prison a number of times and can mix among criminals. In September 2002 I worked with Jaws on a story about drug dealing traffic wardens at APCOA where I had been a warden. This led to an article for which I was paid £1,000 in cash. In October 2002 I gave Maz a story about forged travel documents for which I was paid £750 in cash. I had serious money problems at the time. My mother was ill in Kosovo and I needed to get money for her to have operations. She died in February 2003.

4. I found out that Joe had stolen a turban, books and paintings from Sotheby's where he had been working as a security guard. Luli was trying to sell them. Jay had told me about it. Adrian and the Claimant had nothing to do with it. I told Maz about it. He pretended that he was a wealthy Arab who wanted to buy the stolen goods. I introduced him to Luli and Jay. Luli was expecting around £40,000 for the stolen items. Joe would obviously take a share and Jay would also get something for the introduction. Maz decided that he was not interested in doing a story, but wanted Luli and Jay to carry on thinking that the sale would take place when Maz returned to England (he pretended that he was going to the Middle East). This was so they would want to keep me happy. Obviously, Luli, Jay and Joe were very grateful to me for the introduction to Maz. It was at this point that the idea of a plot to kidnap Victoria Beckham came into life. Maz was always coming up with strange ideas for stories. He said that I could get these people to talk about kidnapping Victoria Beckham and hopefully we could get enough material on tape to run a story. His attitude was that they were already involved in crime so it did not matter. Adrian and the Claimant only got dragged in because they were around at the time and Adrian was prepared to go along with the play acting that I asked him to do (see below).

5. There was never any plot to kidnap Victoria Beckham. It was just an idea for a good newspaper story with a group of people that allowed themselves to be set-up. It was something that was talked about in a general way in pubs and restaurants. Nothing more than that. It was always me that brought up the



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conversation because I was trying to get them to talk about it on tape. They were happy to talk about it because it was an interesting subject and I kept on raising it. How were they to know that I was recording it all for the News of the World? Apart from the recruitment of Jaws, which I deal with below, the conversations were all very general and prompted by me. None of the 5 regarded the discussion as serious. Everything was hypothetical. If you kidnapped Victoria Beckham what ransom could you ask for? Can you transfer that amount of money through a bank? How could you snatch her? When would be the best time? Where would she be kept? I would make suggestions about how and when it could be done, trying to get them to talk about it on tape. They were each trying to impress the other by making out that they were more knowledgeable. They were happy to indulge me in my favourite topic of conversation.

6. The Claimant did not play a significant part in the conversations, except on one occasion at a Portuguese bar and restaurant. This took place on a Saturday night. I brought Jay along even though I knew that Adrian would not be happy to see him. By the time I had arrived everyone had been drinking and there was a party atmosphere. I prompted conversation about how much ransom money you could ask for if you kidnapped Victoria Beckham. This led into a conversation about whether it was possible to transfer large amounts of money through a bank. The Claimant got into a loud argument with Luli. He was saying that it was not possible to transfer large amounts of money and Luli was teasing him about his lack of knowledge. Again, it was just social conversation.
7. I see that the Judge says that the Claimant suggested on 24 October that Christmas would be the best time for the kidnap. This conversation took place at a bar in Brixton. I remember that the Claimant was drinking double Jack Daniels and was clearly drunk. I have looked at the transcript of this part of the conversation. There are lots of gaps. But I can remember that I kept asking questions and making suggestions about when would be the best time to kidnap her, so that I could get a response for the tape. It was hypothetical.
8. As with all the work that I did for Maz, it was always him that was directing the show and pushing me to get people to say things on tape. It was his idea to get Jaws into the "gang" as a driver. I knew that this was not going to be straightforward. There was no way that I was going to ask Luli because he was



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sharper than the others and would have been suspicious. Although Adrian was a doctor, in many ways he was inexperienced and gullible, certainly when it came to mixing in criminal circles.

9. I told him that I owed some money to someone and that I wanted to persuade this person that I had a job for him that could earn him a lot of money. That way he would stop hassling me for money. I asked Adrian to pretend that he was going to recruit this person as a driver for a crime. Adrian was happy to go along with this for me and we arranged to meet at a restaurant in Brixton where he was going anyway. It did not involve any great effort on his part. This conversation would have taken place on the phone an hour or so before the actual meeting at the restaurant where I introduced Jaws. I turned up at the restaurant with Jaws, but before I took him in I left him in the car so I could speak to Adrian in the restaurant to tell him exactly what to say. This can be seen from the transcript. I then left the recording equipment in the car. Having briefed Adrian I returned to get Jaws. As you can see from the video, at various times during the conversation I had to prompt Adrian to say the right things. The Claimant happened to be with Adrian but did not play any part in the meeting.
10. Maz also said that he needed to see one of the 5 carrying a gun. It would make a dramatic photograph and would make the "gang" seem dangerous. Maz knew that I had a replica gun in my flat. (This gun was supplied to me by Robin Halsworth who worked at APCOA). So I asked Adrian if he would help me again with Jaws by coming to my flat and carrying on the story that Jaws was going to be recruited as a driver. Adrian seemed to find it quite amusing and was happy to go along. Maz told me that I had to get Adrian to say that the plan was to kidnap Victoria Beckham. I told Adrian what to say before letting Jaws into my flat with the secret camera. None of it was taken seriously. Adrian played the role even adding that the gun was his "best friend", trying to sound like something out of the Sopranos. The Judge noticed Adrian smiling and described the scene as "stagey". That is because it was stage-managed.
11. One of Maz's ideas was for Luli to be presented as the "boss". This was all part of the fantasy that Maz had captured an international crime syndicate. That is why I got Adrian to say that our Albanian boss needed to give permission to recruit Jaws and in the second meeting that he had given permission. The Judge



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said that it was "odd" that Luli said nothing about this in other recordings. The reason is that he knew nothing about Adrian's dealings with Jaws. There was no way that I would have tried to get Luli involved with Jaws because he would have been too suspicious.

12. Maz was continually pushing me to get at least one of the 5 to go to the Beckham's home. He did not care who went, he just wanted photographs of them there. I did not think I was going to get anyone to go by asking them directly. Getting people to participate in conversation in pubs and restaurants was quite easy, but getting them actually to visit the Beckham's home was of a different order. So I decided to trick Jay into going. Jay was the most stupid of the 5. He was also desperate for money. He was not interested in kidnapping which was way out of his league. I see that the Judge described him as a "dangerous criminal". I saw him as a petty criminal who would "talk big" and who would steal if the opportunity presented itself to him and he thought that he could get away with it. I told him that my girlfriend worked as a nanny for a wealthy family and it would be easy to burgle their home (i did not mention the Beckhams). I suggested that we had a look at it. He agreed. He brought along two Romanians called John and Peter, who he wanted to take on the "job" with him. There was no way he was going to work with Adrian despite me pushing him to. I had no idea where the Beckham's home was and relied on Maz to guide me. I did not record the journey even though it would have been easy to do so with the audio equipment that I had. The reason I did not was because it would have been obvious that Jay, John and Peter had no idea that they were visiting the Beckham's home. I should add that Luli, Joe, Adrian and the Claimant knew nothing about Jay's visit.
13. Maz also wanted to get material on tape about the Beckham's children being taken; again to make it more dramatic. Another meeting was set up with Jay, this time with Jaws present. Maz had got me to buy some alcohol for Jay to loosen his tongue, so I got him a bottle of vodka. The aim was to get Jay to talk about the Beckham's children. As you can see from the transcript, before going in with Jaws, I left him and the microphone in the car so that I could tell Jay what to say. Jay was happy to go along with it because I asked him to and he is fairly stupid. He also wanted to keep in with me because of the sale of the turban and the burglaries I had proposed.



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14. In some of the conversations with Jay and Luli there is talk about the kidnap of an Arab prince. I cannot remember exactly how this arose. I simply used the conversation as a way of talking about kidnap and then changed the subject to Victoria Beckham. There was never any plot to kidnap an Arab prince.
15. In some of the conversations there is talk about a robbery of a Sotheby's security guard. This was an idea that came from Joe who had worked at Sotheby's and knew that the man collected cash in a bag from the bank for the wages every Wednesday. The idea was to snatch the bag from him. I went along with Jay and Adrian to see him collect the cash (Wednesday 23 October). I do not know whether they were going to carry out the robbery. Adrian appeared to need money but he was also nervous. Nothing happened and afterwards Adrian and Jay blamed each other. The Claimant was not there and was not part of the plan. It was discussed the following day in the pub in Brixton when the Claimant was present. He talked about getting a pepper spray but it was clearly pub talk under the influence of alcohol. So far as I know, nothing further happened.
16. Most of Maz's stories involve setting-up people to talk on tape. Sometimes the tapes show that the whole thing is a set-up. Those tapes never see the light of day. In the Beckham case, I remember that 2 or 3 recordings were destroyed by him. In particular, there was a recording made at the Claimant's home on the night of Thursday 24 October which showed clearly that the whole Beckham kidnap plot was a joke. Adrian and the Claimant were there and it took place after the meeting at the pub in Brixton.
17. I was paid £10,000 for the Beckham kidnap story. This amount was agreed in advance with Maz at the beginning, provided we got enough evidence to publish the story. It was more than the other stories I had done because it was such a big story. I banked the money first thing on Monday after the article was published and then sent most of it to my family in Kosovo. I told the police that I had not been paid. Later I was told by Maz that the police had discovered the £10,000 payment. He wanted to downplay how much I had been paid. He told me that I should pretend that only £5,000 was for the Beckham kidnap story and that there were two payments of £2,500 for the parking warden and forged document stories. Maz knew that this was untrue as I had already been paid in



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cash for these stories. The parking warden story was on 1 September and there was no way that Maz would have waited over 2 months to pay me. Maz also promised me a further £5,000 if the men were convicted. I went along with the prosecution and gave false statements to the police. I needed the money, I was still working for Maz and at the time I felt that I could not back away from the story. He is a powerful man, with lots of money and resources behind him. The story had become absolutely massive. The whole process had its own motion and I was not strong enough to stop it. In the end, the charges were dropped and I did not have to give evidence.

18. I continued working on stories with Maz until around May this year. For example, in March this year, I was behind a front page story about an 18 year old girl selling her baby. This was all a set-up that led to the baby being taken into care. The collapse of the kidnap trial did not stop Maz from using me for stories. But from then on he always tried to hide my involvement.

19. I did not meet any lawyer for the News of the World. I just dealt with Maz. The News of the World give him a lot of freedom including large amounts of cash that he does not have to account for. Provided he gets the stories they do not care how. I was not asked to give a statement for the libel action. But I read about it in the papers and talked to Maz a number of times about it. At the time I was living in Plymouth and still working on stories for him. He was very anxious about the case. He phoned me a number of times during the trial and told me to keep my head down. He did not want me to give evidence and was worried that if I was found I could be summoned to come to court. If I had not volunteered to give evidence for the Claimant it would have been almost impossible for me to be traced. I was on a witness protection programme until last year and have kept a low profile.

20. I was deported from the United Kingdom in June this year. My permission to remain had expired. Since leaving England I have had the chance to reflect on my behaviour. Working for Maz was a bit like an addiction. There was a real excitement about getting stories and I was earning good money in cash. Having distanced myself from that life I started to feel very bad about what I had done. I feel particularly guilty about 2 cases. One has resulted in a totally innocent man being sentenced to prison for 4 years. Another is the girl whose child was taken

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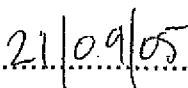
into care. While in an internet café in Kosovo, I entered my name into a google search and found an article by Roy Greenslade of the Guardian about the Beckham case (copy exhibited). The article was spot on. I decided to contact the Guardian to tell them the truth. I also contacted the police. Police officers interviewed me and are carrying out an investigation into a number of prosecutions arising from Maz's stories. I also met Roy Greenslade. Mr Greenslade asked me whether I was prepared to speak to the Claimant's lawyers and I agreed. I have no financial interest in doing so. I am aware that I risk prosecution for lying to the police.

21. I understand from Mr Greenslade that on Friday 9 September the News of the World were told that I had given an interview to the Guardian. On the same day I received a call from Jaws threatening me for having spoken to them.

22. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I confirm that I am willing to give oral evidence.



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Florim Gashi



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Date

