



# News Release

For immediate release

## SENTENCING HANDED DOWN IN VIOLENT ATTACK ON TRANS WOMAN IN BARBADOS

**April 8, 2019** — Brandon Coward, who attacked Barbadian trans woman Alexa Hoffmann with a meat cleaver on February 18, 2018, was today convicted in the Oistins Magistrates Court by Magistrate Elwood Watts and ordered to compensate Alexa BD\$460 (about CAD\$306) or face three months in prison. The gruesome attack left Alexa with serious injuries, including to her throat.

Alexa is a well-known trans activist from Barbados. With the support of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, she organized and led the country's inaugural Pride march in 2017. Alexa is also the lead claimant in the first-ever legal challenge to the country's anti-sodomy law, which is the worst in the Western Hemisphere and can result in life imprisonment. The Legal Network is also supporting Alexa in this ground-breaking court action against a draconian law that was imposed on Barbados during colonization. Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley has herself noted during her tenure as Barbados' Attorney-General that this law contributes to serious human rights violations against LGBTQ Barbadians, and has fueled a vastly disproportionate HIV infection rate amongst LGBTQ people who are driven away from effective HIV interventions.<sup>1</sup>

Coward was convicted after he changed his plea from “Not Guilty” to “Guilty.” Coward was initially charged on February 23, 2018 for the attack and was given bail in the sum of BD\$2,000 (about CAD\$1,330); however, he subsequently absconded bail and was not apprehended until about one year after first being charged. During that year, Alexa lived in constant fear that Coward would return to kill her to prevent her from testifying against him. Alexa was forced to take extreme measures, including spending nearly all of her life savings on a new security system for her home, staying indoors for days on end, and pleading with the public to help locate her attacker. Amazingly, Coward denied using a meat cleaver to attack Alexa and instead said that he wounded her using his fists; however, a medical report from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital explained that the wounds Alexa suffered were consistent with being struck with a sharp blade.

While officers of the Royal Barbados Police Force stated that Coward was known to the courts for matters involving burglary, among other things, they were unable to produce a conviction card. But records showed, corroborated by his own admission, that Coward was previously charged and has other charges pending before the courts. Alexa's attack is apparently the first conviction for Coward.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/world/barbados/bbnews001.htm>

Alexa is relieved that Coward has been apprehended but dismayed at the very short sentence handed down against him. Barbados is a very small society and Alexa is concerned that Coward could return to attack her again.

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**About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network**

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network ([www.aidslaw.ca](http://www.aidslaw.ca)) promotes the human rights of people living with, at risk of or affected by HIV or AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research and analysis, litigation and other advocacy, public education and community mobilization. You can read more about our work in the Caribbean [here](#).

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