

Men cleared of rape after victim said to look 'too masculine'

Angela Giuffrida
Rome

About 200 people protested outside a court of appeal in the Italian city of Ancona yesterday after it was revealed that two men had been cleared of rape charges partly because the victim looked "too masculine" to be a target of attraction.

The reasons behind the 2017 ruling came to light on Friday, when Italy's highest appeals court scrapped the lower court's verdict and ordered a retrial.

The men had been convicted of raping a woman of Peruvian origin, who was 22 at the time of the attack

in 2015, by a court of first instance in 2016. Her name was not made public.

They were then acquitted by the Ancona appeals court, with the judges' reasoning document including a passage that said the woman's story was not credible enough as she resembled a man and was therefore unappealing.

The judges - who were all female - drew their conclusions from a photograph of the woman and because the defendants said they were not attracted to her, with one registering the victim's number in his mobile phone under the name "Viking".

"I read this sentence in 2017 and that's why we referred it to the supreme court," Cinzia Molinaro, the victim's lawyer, told the Guardian.

Salvini's online target Woman to press charges

A woman ridiculed online by Italy's far-right deputy prime minister, Matteo Salvini, is pressing charges after his post provoked a deluge of hateful messages and threats.

Giulia Viola Pacilli, 22, was photographed during an anti-racism march - attended by 250,000 people in Milan on 2 March - holding a sign that read: "Better to be a do-gooder and a whore than a fascist and Salvinist." Salvini shared the photograph on his Facebook page with the caption "What a nice woman" and a laughing emoji. The student became a target of hatred online, receiving messages including one that asked if she would like a "gang of horny illegal immigrants" to be arranged for her. Her lawyer said Pacilli had become scared to leave her home. A case for defamation against almost 300 people will be presented to the postal police, tasked with tackling online hatred. **Angela Giuffrida**

"It was disgusting to read; the judges expressed various reasons for deciding to acquit them, but one was because the [defendants] said they didn't even like her, because she was ugly. They also wrote that a photograph [of the woman] reflected this."

The case will be reheard by a court in Perugia. Molinaro said the woman alleged her drink had been spiked with drugs by the defendants after the group went to a bar following an evening class. Doctors had said her injuries were consistent with rape and her blood had a high level of benzodiazepines, a type of sedative.

Molinaro said the woman moved back to Peru after being ostracised by the community in Ancona because she had reported the men.

Luisa Rizzitelli, a spokesperson for Rebel Network, the women's group that organised the Ancona protest, lambasted the judges' ruling as "medieval". "The worst thing is the cultural message that came from three female judges who acquitted these two men because they decided that it was improbable that they would want to rape someone who looked masculine," said Rizzitelli. "It's shameful."

In brief

United States

Fox News host refuses to say sorry for sexism

The Fox News presenter Tucker Carlson has refused to apologise for sexist remarks he made on talk radio years ago, after they were brought to light in a video compiled by the liberal watchdog Media Matters. In it, he describes women as "extremely primitive" and "like dogs". He calls Britney Spears and Paris Hilton "two of the biggest white whores in America".

On Sunday, Carlson said he had been caught "saying something naughty" a decade ago. "Rather than express the usual ritual contrition, how about this: I'm on television every weeknight live for an hour. If you want to know what I think, you can watch."

Jamiles Lartey *New Orleans*

Morocco

Spanish refugee activist has charges dropped

A Moroccan court has dropped proceedings against Helena Maleno, a Spanish human rights activist investigated for facilitation of illegal immigration through the work of her organisation Walking Borders.

The NGO fields up to 70% of distress calls from migrants crossing the Mediterranean from north Africa and passes their locations to the Spanish coastguard. Although she has won plaudits and prizes, the activist has also come under investigation in Spain and Morocco.

In 2017 she was summoned to a court in Tangier but the case caused an outcry in Spain, where prominent Spanish figures signed a petition to support her. Yesterday, the NGO announced that the Moroccan court had dropped the case because of a lack of evidence. **Sam Jones** *Madrid*

Austria

Hikers face curbs after cow-trampling death

Hikers who visit Austria's mountain pastures will in future be subject to a legally binding code of conduct, officials said yesterday, responding to controversy over the death of a German tourist trampled by cows.

After the incident - which took place in Tyrol in 2014 - a court last month ordered the farmer who owned the cattle to pay hundreds of thousands of euros in damages to the 45-year-old victim's family.

The ruling caused outrage among farmers, partly because the victim had been walking her dog on a lead attached to her waist. Cows can charge at dogs and hikers are advised to release their dogs in such cases, which the tourist did not do.

"We will lay out clearly in the code of conduct what is expected," the Austrian chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, said. **Reuters** *Vienna*



Party faithful

Supporters of the Inkatha Freedom party attend its manifesto launch outside Durban in T-shirts bearing the face of the party's leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi. South Africa goes to the polls on 8 May.



PHOTOGRAPH: RAJESH JANTILAL/AFP/GETTY

Researchers find 'very rare' coral reef off Puglia in first for Italy

Lorenzo Tondo
Palermo

The first coral reef in Italy, which extends for at least 1.6 miles (2.5km) off the Adriatic coast in Puglia, has been identified, according to researchers.

The underwater ecosystem, near the town of Monopoli, is the first mesophotic coral reef - a term applied to ecosystems with low levels of light - to be found in the Mediterranean.



▲ The low-light coral reef is the first of its kind found in the Mediterranean

These types of reef "are found at depths ranging from 30-40 metres ... up to 200 metres", the researchers write in the study published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

Prof Giuseppe Corriero, director of the department of biology at the University of Bari Aldo Moro, who led the research project, said: "The famous Australian or Maldivian coral reefs rise almost to the surface of the water, making the most of the sunlight that is the real fuel of these ecosystems.

"[Mesophotic reefs] are very rare, because they manage to survive and grow despite the lack of light.

"In the 1990s, I worked as a marine biologist in the Maldives. But I never thought I'd find a coral reef, 30 years

later, a stone's throw from my house."

The Puglia reef is about 35-50 metres deep, and researchers say it could extend for tens of kilometres.

Coral reefs in the Mediterranean were once widespread, but over time became extinct. The remnants are still visible, including a small reef on the island of Mljet in Croatia.

Coral reefs occupy less than 0.1% of the world's ocean area, yet provide a home for 25% of marine species, including fish, sponges and molluscs.

However, warming seas and ocean acidification have severely bleached many reefs, and most are incapable of growing quickly enough to compensate for rising sea levels triggered by climate change.