ISIS claim responsibility for London Bridge terror attack by Usman Khan, who stabbed Cambridge graduate, 25, to death in rampage at prisoner rehabilitation conference that paired killers with students and held creative writing workshops

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<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7741575/London-Bridge-terror-attack-victim-named-ordinator-rehabilitation-conference.html>

ISIS last night claimed the London Bridge terror attack was carried out by one of its fighters.

The terrorist organisation said Usman Khan, 28, who killed two and injured several more when he went on a knife rampage in central London on Friday, acted on their behalf.

The group, however, did not provide any evidence this is the case as it made the claim through its news agency.

It added that the attack was made in response to Islamic State calls to target countries that have been part of a coalition fighting the jihadist group.

'The person who carried out the London attack... was a fighter from the Islamic State, and did so in response to calls to target citizens of coalition countries,' IS said, referring to a multi-country alliance against the group.

It had previously been speculated that the attack may have been revenge for the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Khan was shot and killed by armed police after he stabbed two people to death and wounded three others while wearing a fake suicide vest on London Bridge.

The attacker, who was jailed in 2012 for his role in an al Qaeda-inspired terror group that plotted to bomb the London Stock Exchange, had first been tackled and disarmed by a group of brave bystanders on the bridge.

Jack Merritt, 25, from Cottenham, was yesterday named by his father as one of two victims killed by Khan at a prisoner rehabilitation conference at Fishmongers' Hall, where the attack began on Friday afternoon.

Mr Merritt was the course co-ordinator for Learning Together, an education scheme run by the University of Cambridge's Institute of Criminology that killer Khan had attended on Friday.

The group had been hosting a conference at the Grade II-listed building when the attack began, with Khan one of the former criminals attending the rehabilitation seminar for prisoners.

Mr Merritt's father David said in a tweet that his son 'would not wish his death to be used as the pretext for more draconian sentences or for detaining people unnecessarily'.

'R.I.P. Jack: you were a beautiful spirit who always took the side of the underdog.'

He also said his son had been a 'champion' for those who had been 'dealt a losing hand by life, who ended up in the prison system'.

Jack's godfather Paul Brooker described his death as 'a sickening waste of a young, hugely talented life', adding he was 'smart, funny and loved his work'.

Neighbour Dawn Marr, 80, said: 'Jack was such a fine young man. His father was very proud of him. I used to babysit for him and his brother. It's a terrible loss.'

And another neighbour, who asked not to be named, added: 'It is devastating news. We're in the process of letting our children know.

'They went to school with Jack, so it's all very sad and shocking.'

Giving a statement outside Scotland Yard, Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu said Khan was subject to an 'extensive list of licence conditions' on his release from prison and that 'to the best of my knowledge he was complying with those conditions'.

David said: 'Jack spoke so highly of all the people he worked with & he loved his job.

'Thank you for your support. I know his colleagues are in shock- please look after each other at this terrible time.'

British rapper David Orobosa Omoregie, known only as Dave, also paid tribute to the graduate on Twitter. He wrote: 'Rest in peace brother. One of the most painful things. Jack Merritt was the best guy.

'Dedicated his life to helping others, was genuinely an honour to have met someone like you and everything you've done for us I'll never ever forget'.

Jack studied law at Manchester University before doing an postgraduate degree at Cambridge. He had recently enjoyed a birthday weekend in Spain with his girlfriend, Leanne O'Brien.

Lecturers recalled him being 'destined for great things'.

Colleague Serena Wright described him as 'the sweetest, most caring and selfless individual I've ever met', adding on Twitter: 'I loved him to pieces.

'The warmest heart, always with time for anyone. Completely irreplaceable.'

A woman was also killed and three others were injured in the knife rampage carried out by Usman Khan.

Police were called to the north side of London Bridge at 1.58pm on Friday, after reports of a stabbing near Bank station and Fishmongers' Hall, which was hosting an event called 'Learning Together'.

Khan had threatened to blow up the building at the start of the rampage before he headed towards London Bridge wearing a fake suicide vest.

Minutes later, witnesses saw the knifeman being wrestled to the ground by members of the public before armed-response officers confronted him at 2.03pm and shot him dead.

Two brave members of the public chased after the knifeman, one armed with a narwhal tusk and another with a fire extinguisher.

Armed police, who confronted the suspect at 2.03pm, were heard shouting 'stop moving' twice before shooting the man at close range.

The workshop run by Jack featured storytelling and creative writing moments before Khan began his attack.

Khan had previously participated in Cambridge University's Learning Together prisoner rehabilitation sessions but had showed 'no cause for concern,' a source with knowledge of the programme said.

The conference was posted on eventbrite and stated that it was 'a day to celebrate, connect and collaborate'.

Workshops included interactive storytelling and creative writing workshops, and a panel discussion was due to take place on 'the power of education for social justice'.

According to the Learning Together schedule of the day, Khan began his terror spree during the storytelling and creative writing session.

Academics and criminal justice campaigners tweeted about the day at the grade II listed building and a photograph was posted online of the gathering.

The 28-year-old attacker is understood to have been invited to share his experience of prison and wore black clothing and sand-coloured boots, according to [The Times.](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/london-bridge-terror-screams-of-machete-as-attacker-unleashed-murder-and-mayhem-dm9lxl95f)

A witness named Coralie said around 100 guests and 50 staff were in attendance.

Khan returned to the hall via the grand staircase after the morning session where he later threatened to blow up the hall, a member of staff said.

He reportedly started 'lashing out' in a room downstairs and was heading upstairs when he was tackled by the other conference-goers and 'bundled out' of the front door past a room of unarmed people.

According to the source, all those involved in tackling Khan, with the exception of the man reported to be a Polish chef, were ex-offenders.

At the time of the incident they were all either on day release, or had been released on licence.

One of the group was James Ford, who admitted the murder of a woman with the mental age of a 15-year-old, in 2014.

Amanda Champion, 21, was strangled and slashed across the throat by Ford in a completely random attack in Ashford, Kent.

Ford was caught after a Samaritans worker broke a vow of anonymity to tell police that a man who had phoned the confidential service 45 times had confessed to killing a woman.

The source said that risk assessment is 'front and centre' in the Learning Together programme, due to the involvement of students.

They added that normal procedures by police and probation service had been undertaken with Khan and he had shown 'no cause for concern' up until the moment of the incident.

Khan was jailed in 2012 for terrorism offences for his part in an al Qaeda-inspired terror group that plotted to bomb the London Stock Exchange and the US Embassy and kill Boris Johnson.

In an old letter from 2012 the terrorist begged to be shown mercy as he asked for a course to be arranged so that Khan could 'properly learn Islam and its teachings, and I can prove I don't carry the extreme views which I might have carried before.'

He writes: 'I am much more mature and want to live my life as a good Muslim and also a good citizen of Britain.

'So if you could arrange something for me and send me the details, this would be truly appreciated.'

The letter emerged as a furious political row began yesterday after it was revealed that Khan was released automatically from prison last year.

As part of the plotting, Khan's group planned to set up a training camp in Kashmir, where his family had land.

Khan, born and raised in Stoke-on-Trent, originally received an indeterminate sentence for public protection with a minimum of eight years behind bars after his 2012 arrest, meaning he would remain locked up for as long as necessary, to protect the public.

Passing judgment at the time, Mr Justice Wilkie said: 'In my judgment, these offenders would remain, even after a lengthy term of imprisonment, of such a significant risk that the public could not be adequately protected by their being managed on licence in the community, subject to conditions, by reference to a preordained release date.'

But this sentence was quashed at the Court of Appeal in April 2013 and he was given a determinate 16-year jail term instead, meaning he would be automatically released after eight years.

Judges including Lord Justice Leveson said at the time when reversing the original sentence that the Parole Board was best placed to decide when he would be safe to be released from jail.

But yesterday the Parole Board released a statement saying that Khan was released automatically and they did not make the decision.

It has also emerged that he was a student and 'personal friend' of hate preacher Anjem Choudary. Khan spent years preaching on stalls that were linked to al-Muhajiroun, the banned terror group once led by Choudary.

Earlier, the Queen paid tribute to those who died as well as those who bravely fought the attacker.

She said: 'Prince Philip and I have been saddened to hear of the terror attacks at London Bridge.

'We send our thoughts, prayers and deepest sympathies to all those who have lost loved ones and who have been affected by yesterday's terrible violence.

'I express my enduring thanks to the police and emergency services, as well as the brave individuals who put their own lives at risk to selflessly help and protect others.'

The attack coincided with a similar rampage in Holland which saw three children stabbed on a shopping street in The Hague early on Friday evening, Dutch police said.

And in Paris, the Gare Du Nord train station was briefly evacuated after an alleged explosive device was found in an unattended bag.

Unverified pictures show the device, which resembles a mortar shell, inside an old duffel bag in France. However, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick insisted Khan acted alone.

In the letter that Khan wrote from prison, obtained by ITV News, he asked his lawyer to be enrolled in a programme of deradicalisation to 'prove to the authorities' that he was no longer 'immature'.

He said he wanted to 'learn Islam and its teachings' through a course run by the Home Office, and 'live my life as a good Muslim'.

His lawyer Vajahat Sharif told the Guardian: 'He requested intervention by a deradicaliser when he was in prison. The only option was the probation service and they cannot deal with these offenders. He asked me on the phone to get assistance from a specific deradicaliser.

‘He asked (me) once or twice before he was released in 2018. Probation do a good job with conventional offenders but they can't deal with ideological offenders.'

At the time of the attack, Khan had been attending a conference on rehabilitation hosted by Cambridge University at Fishmonger's Hall.

Prior to the attack, the 28-year-old had shown 'no cause for concern', a source with knowledge of the rehabilitation programme said.

It has also emerged that he was a student and 'personal friend' of hate preacher Anjem Choudary. Khan spent years preaching on stalls that were linked to al-Muhajiroun, the banned terror group once led by Choudary.

As part of the plotting which led to his 2012 arrest, Khan's group planned to set up a training camp in Kashmir, where his family had land.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said that it was a 'mistake' to release Khan from prison and has vowed to crack down on early releases for inmates. The PM visited the scene of the attack on Saturday with Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick, and Home Secretary Priti Patel.

Khan was released on licence in December 2018 and was still wearing a monitoring tag at the time of the attack, which he carried out while wearing a fake suicide vest.

Scotland Yard Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu confirmed that a man and a woman were killed in the attack which saw Khan stab up to five people before being shot dead by armed police as hundreds of commuters fled in terror.

Anti-terror police have raided a house in the Staffordshire area linked to the killer, believed to be a bail hostel for offenders.

Armed with two knives and wearing a fake suicide vest, Khan was tackled by members of the public, including ex-offenders, before he was shot dead by police on London Bridge next to the Hall.

Video footage posted online shows Khan being taken to the ground as one man sprays him with a fire extinguisher and another, reportedly a Polish man who worked at the Hall, lunges towards him with a narwhal tusk believed to have been taken from the wall inside the Hall.

It is understood that Khan started 'lashing out' in a downstairs room of the Hall but was grabbed by the conference-goers and bundled out of the front door as he tried to go upstairs.

Meanwhile, the Queen has sent 'thoughts, prayers and deepest sympathies to all those who have lost loved ones' in the London Bridge attack and praised the 'brave individuals who put their own lives at risk to selflessly help and protect others'.