

EASTERN CARIBBEAN SUPREME COURT

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE

ALL TERRITORIES

PRACTICE DIRECTION

No. of 2020

SENTENCING FOR THE OFFENCE OF MURDER

This practice direction is issued pursuant to the *Supreme Court Order 1968*¹. It directs that sentencing to a custodial term for the offence of murder, in order to promote consistency in sentencing, shall hereafter follow the approach below to be applied in the territories falling under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court.

Title

This practice direction may be cited as the “Practice Direction on Sentencing for the Offence of Murder for the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court”.

Interpretation

1 In this Schedule—

“Adult” means a person aged 18 or over.

“An act of terrorism” for the purpose of this guidance means a death arising from:

¹ See also the s85 of the *Supreme Court Act 1968* which empowers the making of rules of court under the *Supreme Court Order*.

- (i) an act of a person on behalf of, or in connection with, any organization which carries out activities directed towards the overthrowing or influencing by force or violence the lawful government of a state; or
- (ii) an act intended to raise in the public a fear of future and further indiscriminate violence against bystanders in a public place.

“Child” bears the meaning under the relevant domestic legislation.

“Criminal gang” means a group of three or more persons who share a criminal purpose.

“Determinate sentence” means a sentence fixed as to the amount of time to be spent imprisoned.

“Whole life sentence” means a sentence of imprisonment for the duration of the offender’s natural life.

Sentences for murder

- 2 A conviction for the offence of murder may result in one of the following sentences:
 - a. Sentence of death;
 - b. A whole life sentence;
 - c. A determinate sentence;
 - d. Detention by the court where an offender has been found to be insane or suffering relevant mental illness; or
 - e. Detention at the court’s pleasure.

Sentence of death

- 3 Sentence of death, where lawful for murder, may only be considered in cases:
 - a. Where the offender was aged 18 or over when he committed the offence;
 - b. Where there has been a conviction after trial;
 - c. Which are ‘the rarest of the rare’;
 - d. Which are ‘the worst of the worst’;
 - e. Where there is no reasonable prospect of reform of the offender;

- f. Where the offender has been appropriately evaluated by a psychiatrist;
- g. Where the character of the offender and any other relevant circumstances are taken into account so far as possible as mitigation in his favour;
- h. Which are compared with other murder cases and not with ordinary civilized behavior; and
- i. Where the object of punishment cannot be achieved by any means other than sentence of death.

Whole life sentence

4 If:

- a. the court considers that the seriousness of the offence (or the combination of the offence and one or more offences associated with it) is exceptionally high, and
- b. the offender was aged 18 or over when he committed the offence,

the appropriate starting point is a whole life sentence.

5 Cases that would normally fall within paragraph 4 include:

- a. the murder of two or more persons;
- b. the murder is associated with a series of serious criminal acts;
- c. a substantial degree of premeditation or planning;
- d. the abduction of the victim;
- e. a murder involving sexual or sadistic conduct;
- f. a murder involving prolonged suffering and torture;
- g. the murder of a police officer, emergency service worker, prison officer, judicial officer, health worker, teacher, community worker or any other public official exercising public or community functions and the offence arose because of the victim's occupation or voluntary work;
- h. a murder relating to membership of a criminal gang;
- i. a murder which is an act of terrorism;

- j. a murder motivated by hatred for or prejudice against a group of people to which the offender believed the victim belonged (eg people of a particular religion, race or ethnic religion, language, or sexual orientation or age or having a particular disability);
- k. a murder involving the actual or threatened use of explosives or chemical or biological agent;
- l. a deliberate killing for payment (eg a contract killing);
- m. where the offender is assessed as likely to commit further offences of serious violence and is therefore a substantial danger to the community;
- n. a murder by an offender previously convicted of murder; or
- o. a murder by an offender who has a record for multiple previous convictions for serious offences of violence.

Determinate Sentence

6 If:

- a. the case does not fall within paragraph 4 but the court considers that the seriousness of the offence (or the combination of the offence and one or more offences associated with it) is particularly high, and
- b. the offender was aged 18 or over when he committed the offence,

the appropriate starting point is a determinate sentence of 40 years.

7 Cases that (if not falling within paragraph 4) would normally fall within paragraph 6 include:

- a. where the offender has pleaded guilty and would otherwise face a whole life term²;
- b. a murder involving the use of a firearm;
- c. a murder done for gain (such as a murder done in the course of robbery or burglary, or done in the expectation of gain like insurance or inheritance as a result of the death);
- d. a murder intended to obstruct or interfere with the course of justice;
- e. a murder involving a lesser degree of sexual or sadistic conduct than referred to above; or

² In such a circumstance, there would be no further discount on account of the guilty plea.

- f. a murder in the context of a significant history of domestic violence.
- 8 If:
- a. the offender was aged 18 or over at the time of the offence;
 - b. the case does not fall within paragraph 4(1) or 6(1), and
 - c. the offence falls within paragraph 9 below,
- the offence is normally to be regarded as sufficiently serious for the appropriate starting point to be a determinate sentence of 30 years.
- 9 Cases that would normally fall within paragraph 8 are where the offender took a bladed weapon or blunt instrument to the scene intending to:
- a. commit any offence, or
 - b. have it available to use as a weapon, and
 - c. used that weapon in committing the murder.
- 10 If the offender was aged 18 or over when he committed the offence and the case does not fall within paragraph 4, 6 or 8, the appropriate starting point is a determinate sentence of 25 years.
- 11 If the offender was aged under 18 when the offence was committed, the appropriate starting point is a determinate sentence of 20 years. If the sentence is 'detention at the court's pleasure', the court must set a minimum time to be served and then review the circumstance of the offender every 3 years from the date of sentence.

Aggravating and mitigating factors

- 12 Having chosen a starting point, the court should take into account any further aggravating or mitigating factors pertaining to the offence to the extent that it has not allowed for them in its choice of starting point. Care must be taken not to double-count.

- 13 Aggravating factors (separate from mention in paragraphs 5 and 7) that may be relevant include:
- a. a significant degree of planning or premeditation;
 - b. the victim was vulnerable because young or elderly or had a disability or because geographically isolated;
 - c. mental or physical suffering inflicted on the victim before death;
 - d. abuse of a position of trust or authority over the victim;
 - e. where the offence involved a great risk of death to another person or persons;
 - f. where the offence was an organized criminal activity;
 - g. where the offence occurred at the home of the victim or any other person;
 - h. where the offence was committed to conceal another offence;
 - i. the use of duress or threats against another person to facilitate the commission of the offence;
 - j. where the victim was providing a public service or performing a public duty;
 - k. concealment, disposal, destruction or dismemberment of the body; or
 - l. being on bail at the time of the murder.
- 14 Mitigating factors that may be relevant include:
- a. an intention to cause serious bodily harm rather than to kill;
 - b. where the offender was acting under duress;
 - c. where the offender does not have a record of previous convictions for personal violence;
 - d. where the offender offered assistance to the authorities;
 - e. where the offender suffered a mental disability which lowered his degree of culpability;
 - f. where the offender was provoked;
 - g. where the offender acted to an extent in self-defence;
 - h. a belief by the offender that the murder was an act of mercy;
 - i. the age of the offender;
 - j. where the offender was not aware of the full consequences of his action because of his age or disability;
 - k. good prospects for rehabilitation; or

- I. where the offender is unlikely to reoffend.

Credit for plea

- 15 Where the offender has pleaded guilty at the first practicable opportunity, he may receive a discount of up to one-third of any determinate sentence.

Time on remand

- 16 Time spent on remand should count toward the sentence.

Parole

- 17 Where appropriate, the court should declare the minimum term to be served before consideration for parole.