

Widow of Pulse Gunman Cleared of All Charges in Deadly Mass Shooting

An Orlando jury on Friday cleared the widow of the Pulse nightclub gunman of all charges in the massacre that killed 49 people, finding her not guilty of misleading investigators and aiding her husband in the attack.

Noor Salman, 31, could have faced up to life in prison had she been convicted of federal charges of obstruction of justice and aiding Mateen in providing support to the Islamic State militant group.

Instead the U.S. District Court jury acquitted Salman after roughly 12 hours of deliberation that began on Wednesday.

Mateen died in an exchange of gunfire with police at Pulse, a gay nightspot. At the time, Salman was home with the couple's then 3-year-old son.

"We knew from day one she was innocent," Salman's aunt, Susan Adieh, told reporters just after the verdict.

The acquittal was likely to be an emotional blow for the survivors and families of those killed. The attack stunned and dismayed lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and Latinos who frequented Pulse.

At the time of the June 12, 2016, massacre, it was the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history. It has since been surpassed by the Las Vegas attack in which a shooter opened fire on an outdoor concert from his hotel room last year, killing 58 people.

"We're very sorry for the family members and friends of the 49 victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting, and also the

survivors of that horrible attack," said Susan Clary, Noor's family's spokeswoman.

A group of victims' relatives and friends, accompanied by Pulse owner Barbara Poma, left the courthouse without responding to reporters' questions.

Brandon Wolf, a survivor of the rampage, wrote on Twitter, "Noor Salman does not define justice for the 49. We do. In our fight to protect other communities from feeling our pain. In our commitment to creating a better, safer world for our children.

"Stay strong, Orlando. We are justice."

When U.S. District Judge Paul Byron announced the not-guilty verdict, Salman broke down in tears and hugged her defense lawyers, according to reporters inside the courtroom.

"I don't know how we're going to make up for the last two years," Salman's uncle, Al Salman, told reporters. "I told you, and I can tell you now, that she's innocent."

Mateen, 29, opened fire shortly after 2 a.m. during the club's popular Latin night, shooting patrons on the dance floor and spraying bullets at others hiding in bathroom stalls. He then held hostages during a standoff with police, claiming allegiance to a leader of the Islamic State militant group before he was shot dead.

Prosecutors said Salman cased possible attack sites with her husband and did nothing to stop his plans. They claimed she initially told investigators her husband acted without her knowledge but later said she knew he was watching Islamic State recruitment videos, had purchased an assault rifle and examined three possible attack locations.

However, the Federal Bureau of Investigation did not record its interrogation of her, and the defense said she was coerced

into making statements.

Defense attorneys said Salman was a “simple woman who loved children” and did not know of her husband’s intentions.

The jury appeared to believe the defense portrayal of Salman as a battered spouse kept in the dark, said David Weinstein, a former federal prosecutor and now a partner at Coral Gables, Florida-based Hinshaw & Culbertson.

“The lack of a videotaped confession had to have had an impact on the jury’s acceptance of her confession. From their not guilty verdict, it is clear they believed it was coerced,” Weinstein said in a statement. {eoa}

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