
SENATOR CONVICTED OVER RACIST REMARK ABOUT ITALY'S FIRST BLACK MINISTER

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A senator from Italys far-right League has been given an 18-month prison sentence for likening the countrys first black minister to an orangutan.

Roberto Calderoli said during a party rally in July 2013 that whenever he saw pictures of Cécile Kyenge, an MEP who at the time was integration minister, I cannot but think of the features of an orangutan.

Calderoli argued his comments about Kyenge, who moved to Italy from Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in 1983 to study medicine, were playful banter.

A court in Bergamo found him guilty of defamation aggravated by racial hatred. But it is not certain whether he will serve any prison time □ the sentence will only become definitive once a process of two appeals has been exhausted, and terms of less than two years are usually suspended.

However, Kyenge said the verdict was a crucial result, especially at a time when racism was on the rise.

Its a very important signal, she said. It means there are still judges who manage to keep watch over the political and public scene, and shows they are also trying to speak in the name of respect and dignity for people [who suffer racist attacks], and for fundamental rights. Words are weighty, and when they come from a politician, they risk having a very negative impact.

It was among the most high-profile racist attacks against Kyenge during her time in Enrico Lettas government. She also had bananas thrown at her during political events and repeatedly faced insults and slurs from other politicians, the majority of whom were from the League but also from Brothers of Italy, a smaller far-right party.

In 2017, Mario Borghezio, a League MEP, was ordered to pay □□□□□ (£44,000) for describing Lettas administration as the bongo-bongo government upon Kyenges appointment. She is pursuing legal cases against nine other politicians.

Matteo Salvini, the leader of the League and Italys interior minister, is suing Kyenge for defamation after she called the party racist. A second hearing is scheduled for 29 March at a court in Piacenza.

Kaynak/Source: