**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 03 February 2021**

**Ruhama welcomes the formal establishment of the Garda Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit**

Ruhama welcomes the formal establishment of the Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit of the Garda National Protective Services Bureau. Ruhama has been a partner of the unit, formerly known as and operating as Operation Quest, since it’s inception and has supported the unit by providing frontline expertise across a range of areas associated with it’s work.

Speaking following the formal launch of the unit, Ruhama CEO, Barbara Condon gave Ruhama’s frontline perspective: “We know from our experience with service users that the world of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation is deeply linked with organised crime and that the investigation of cases associated with these crimes are often complex to pursue. The formal launch of this unit displays a renewed focus in An Garda Síochána to targeting these crimes and the professional networks associated with them. Today’s proceedings are just one example of how one case can yield results across an entire network of criminality, potentially bringing to an end the human rights abuses against the victims of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking associated with these networks.”

While Ruhama has noted a reported increased familiarity with An Garda Síochána and an increased inclination to report any crimes committed against them associated with the sex trade amongst its service users, it is undeniable that ongoing gender based violence is endemic in commercial sexual exploitation. We join with our colleagues in the Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit in continuing to encourage victims of all crime associated with these activities to come forward and avail of assistance from frontline services such as Ruhama.

Ms Condon continued, “It is essential that all victims are made fully aware of the decriminalisation of prostitution under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 and that there are a range of services available to assist them in any way necessary. With a renewed vigour associated with the formal launch of the unit must come a renewed commitment to reaching those most vulnerable, especially in pandemic times where women in prostitution have so often been the forgotten voice. We must continue to work together to pursue those who exploit vulnerable and marginalised women for criminal means with the full strength of the law behind us.”

**- ENDS -**

For further information please contact:

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**About Ruhama**

Ruhama is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and a registered charity, which works on a nationwide basis with women, including transgender women, affected by prostitution and sex trafficking. Ruhama offers free and confidential support and assistance to women who:

• Are actively involved in prostitution

• Are seeking to exit (leave) prostitution

• Are victims of sex trafficking

• Have a past experience of prostitution/sex trafficking.

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