



## **Ruhama & survivors of the sex trade call out ‘The Sexual Violence of Prostitution & Pornography’**

Today, survivors of prostitution and sex trafficking are gathered in Dublin’s Mansion House for the launch of Ruhama’s 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary event: ‘The Sexual Violence of Prostitution & Pornography.’ The event marks Ruhama’s 30 years on the frontline with women affected by prostitution and sex trafficking, as well as the global *16 Days of Action to End Gender Based Violence* campaign.

At a panel discussion in the Mansion House on Wednesday evening, Ruhama spoke to five inspirational women who have all survived commercial sexual exploitation and now dedicate their lives to prevent and respond to this abhorrent violation of women’s human rights. The survivors are representatives and colleagues of [SPACE International](#), an organisation uniting survivors of prostitution around the world to call for recognition of prostitution as abuse and campaigning against the sex trade: Rachel Moran, Fiona Broadfoot, Melanie Thompson, Nicole Bell and Mickey Meji.

On Thursday, Ruhama will host an all-day conference at the Royal College of Surgeons which will unite survivors of the sex trade, as well as national and international policy-makers, frontline agencies and other experts on the issues of prostitution and pornography.

Speaking at the launch of the event at the Mansion House on Wednesday afternoon, Ruhama CEO Barbara Condon said: ‘We know we can be the purveyors of doom when it comes to sexual exploitation, but with good reason. The majority of the women we have supported over thirty years have gone through serious harm, trauma and abuse at the hands of pimps, traffickers and sex buyers. Other women haven’t made it out of the system alive.’

‘However,’ she continued, ‘there is reason to be hopeful. We have supported many women to overcome the trauma they have endured and move on with their lives which is never easy but can be achieved. Ireland also took a decisive stance against the proliferation of the sex trade in 2017 with the passing of the Sexual Offences Act. Those in the sex trade were decriminalised, and we now have a law targeting commercial sexual exploitation right at the source: the demand. Without demand from ‘sex-buyers’ women would not be exploited in brothels in every part of the country. We welcome all actions to target buyers so far and want to see continued and increased implementation of this law in coming years.’

She continued: ‘We could not hold an event on sexual exploitation without including pornography. Pornography is ruining our ideas around sexual relationships. Women we work with report that punters feel emboldened by the violence they see in pornography and seek to re-enact it on them. Many of the women we support have been inducted into the sex trade through violent, graphic pornography. They have no idea where these videos will end up – it’s cruel. Porn has become the new norm for young people. How are they supposed to understand consent and mutual desire when porn is so prolific?’

DUBLINER Rachel Moran is Executive Director of SPACE International. Speaking at the Mansion House today, Ms. Moran said: “We’re really glad to welcome sex trade survivors who confront this issue in Britain, South Africa and different regions of the USA. The sex-based violence of prostitution exists all over the world, and a global problem requires a global solution.”

Other speakers at the event on Thursday include Dr. Monica O’Connor, author of *The Sex Economy*, Per-Anders Sunnesson, the Swedish Ambassador at Large to Combat Human Trafficking, Labour Senator Ivana Bacik, Detective Chief Superintendent of the Garda National Protective Services Bureau Declan Daly, CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre Noeline Blackwell, and Tom Farr from CEASE UK (the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation).

Ms. Condon concluded by saying: ‘Organisers and buyers of prostitution and pornography are the ones who gain from the sex trade. The women exploited in this system are some of the most vulnerable, marginalised and voiceless people in our society. We are so grateful to have the opportunity to hear directly from those who have been impacted by commercial sexual exploitation, and we hope that their messages are heeded: protect those affected by prostitution, and hold all those who exploit them accountable. Ireland is being referenced internationally as a model for change, and must take its responsibilities seriously. Our laws send a clear message: we will not tolerate a society where women’s bodies are seen as commodities for male sexual gratification.’

*If you are in a difficult situation in the sex trade, you can free-text REACH to 50100 for a free, confidential call back.*

**-Ends-**

For further information please contact Amanda Keane, Policy & Communications Manager at [policy@ruhama.ie](mailto:policy@ruhama.ie) or 0862591247.

### **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.



### **SPACE International**

SPACE was first formed in Ireland, in 2012, for the purpose of changing social attitudes towards prostitution and pressing for its recognition as a sexually exploitative human rights violation. All of the representatives of SPACE International have lived experience of the sex trade, and many of them have extensive experience of front-line work in combatting prostitution and offering exit services to prostituted women and girls.