



## **Ruhama welcomes landmark conviction in human trafficking case**

### **First conviction for human trafficking in the history of the state a huge step forward**

Ruhama has greatly welcomed today's conviction for human trafficking in Mullingar Circuit Criminal Court – the first conviction of its kind in the history of the state. Ruhama service users played a crucial part in providing evidence in this case with the support of caseworkers from Ruhama and other agencies. Ruhama service users showed immense courage and resilience in recounting their challenging experiences at the hands of the defendants throughout the hearings and this evidence formed an essential part of the prosecution arguments. This case shows clearly that access to justice supports for victims of crime are a key facet of the successful prosecution of sexual exploitation cases.

The absence of convictions under the prevailing human trafficking legislation has been a persistent criticism of the Irish state on a national and international stage for some time. This landmark conviction marks an historic step forward for the state in addressing the heinous crime that is human trafficking in Ireland. This conviction sends a clear signal to the network of criminality associated with human trafficking that they will be subject to punishment under Irish law and that these punishments are being handed down in Irish courts. This conviction sends a clear message to those who seek to traffick human beings that they do not act with impunity in Ireland and they will be held accountable for their actions. Furthermore, the associated convictions in respect of other criminality speaks to what frontline agencies such as Ruhama and others have known for some time – that the sex trade in Ireland is heavily linked with other forms of organised criminality.

Speaking after the judgement was handed down this afternoon, Ruhama CEO, Barbara Condon commented, "today's judgement is undoubtedly historic and we greatly welcome the verdict. Our caseworkers have worked tirelessly with the women involved as witnesses for 3 years and were on-site in a support capacity throughout the hearings. The courage and resilience showed by these women was staggering and they are to be commended for their essential contributions to the case. This conviction signals a key milestone in the recovery journey of these women who sought to contribute to justice against their perpetrators. It is our hope that they will serve as an important example to other victims of sexual exploitation that justice is possible and they can pursue perpetrators in the knowledge that they will be supported by agencies like Ruhama and An Garda Síochána."

Continuing on the issue of access to justice for victims of sexual exploitation, "today's conviction gives a clear indication to the justice environment that access to justice for victims of sexual exploitation is vital, not only for the wellbeing of the victims, but also for the successful prosecution of cases against the perpetrators. Victims of sexual exploitation can be subjected to coercion and intimidation at the hands of perpetrators and this can lead to a reluctance on the part of victims to report crimes or participate in the justice system as a result of fear of repercussions. It is essential that every effort is made to create an environment in the investigation and prosecution of these cases that gives every opportunity to victims to engage with these systems."

**- ENDS -**

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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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