



For Immediate Release

Monday 21 January 2019

Ruhama welcomes first conviction of sex-buyers in Ireland under Sexual Offences Act 2017

Ruhama, Ireland's only dedicated frontline NGO supporting women affected by prostitution and sex-trafficking, has welcomed Ireland's first conviction for paying for sex on Monday January 21st in Dublin's District Court. A man was discovered paying women for sex during a raid at a brothel in Blanchardstown, Dublin 15, and subsequently charged under Part 4 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017. He was convicted and fined €200.

Speaking following the hearing, Ruhama CEO, Sarah Benson, welcomed the judge's decision: "This case sends a clear message to Irish society that it is not acceptable to pay for access to another person's body for sexual gratification. Sex buyers have been operating with impunity in Ireland for far too long, and we are hopeful that more convictions will be achieved under this legislation in future. Evidence has shown that tackling 'demand' is a key mechanism for preventing the sexual exploitation of the most vulnerable in our society. While the sex trade continues to thrive due to buyer's demand, the criminal gangs running it are profiting."

Ms. Benson drew on the shocking findings of [Ruhama's 2018 'Andreea' campaign](#) to highlight the need to criminalise sex buyers: "We know that buyers don't care about the welfare of the person they are seeking so-called 'sexual services' from, even when they are victims of trafficking. Paying for sex is not an expression of sexuality: it is primarily the assertion of male dominance over women. Women we work with have reported countless incidences of physical and sexual violence experienced at the hands of sex-buyers. We are hopeful that this conviction will result in increased public awareness about the law, as well as the role that demand plays in fuelling the harm inherent to the sex trade."

Legislation criminalising the purchase of sex came into effect in March 2017 following years of concerted campaigning efforts by over 70 civil society organisations to align Ireland's laws with the so-called Nordic or 'Equality' Model of prostitution legislation that has been increasingly implemented globally. The act criminalises sex-buyers, while decriminalising individuals who sell sex. A primary objective is to tackle the demand that leads to sexual exploitation of, predominantly women and girls. It is estimated that there are up to 1,000 people in prostitution in Ireland at any time, mostly behind closed doors.

Ms Benson added: "An essential component of the law introduced in 2017 was the decriminalisation of individuals selling sex, in recognition that those in prostitution are often vulnerable and marginalised. They are also at high risk of suffering as victims of crimes including trafficking, sexual assaults and robbery. They should never be considered criminals but rather offered support and assistance, including from the Gardaí should they require it."

Sarah Benson concluded: “We have seen the challenges faced in implementing the legislation. This case will have an important chilling effect on those who may be considering exploiting others simply for their own sexual satisfaction. However, there must be continuity and we strongly encourage the Department of Justice and Equality to ensure sufficient resources for specialist Garda units assigned to this vital work of targeting sex buyers and the criminal organisers who feed their demand.”

Any individuals who are involved in the sex-trade and need support, can text the word REACH for free to 50100 for a confidential call back.

[ENDS]

Notes:

1. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act was passed in March 2017:
<https://www.ruhama.ie/assets/Press-Releases/Press-Release-Ruhama-Sexual-Offences-Act-2015.pdf>
2. Ruhama’s 2018 “Andreea” campaign highlighted the attitudes of sex-buyers towards a young fictitious woman who was a victim of sex-trafficking. 68% of men requested ‘sexual services’ even after hearing her story. Watch: *What Irish sex-buyers are really thinking*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PmAxaWfXv4>

Media contacts:

Sarah Benson, Ruhama CEO: 0866003115

Amanda Keane, Ruhama Policy and Communications Manager: 0862591247

About Ruhama:

[Ruhama](#) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and a registered charity, which works on a nationwide basis with 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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Ruhama
30/31 Camden Street
Dublin 2

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Tel: +353 1 836 0292

Website: www.ruhama.ie

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Ruhamalreland

Twitter: [@Ruhamaagency](https://twitter.com/Ruhamaagency)

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/ruhama>