

PRESS RELEASE: For immediate release 27 March 2018

First anniversary of new law to tackle sex buyers: more needs to be done

Marking the first anniversary of the commencement of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, organisations supporting victims of sexual exploitation gathered today to call for more effective implementation of this crucially important legislation.

Denise Charlton, SERP, Sexual Exploitation Research Project, UCD, said, “The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 has the capacity to provide much-needed and long overdue improved protections for victims of prostitution and trafficking, but only if it is effectively implemented. We would urge the Government and the relevant agencies to support the spirit of this law, and translate it into action.

“The new legislation is reliant on its application and enforcement, public awareness and a strong, coordinated effort between the State and An Garda Síochána to target sex buyers, pimps and traffickers and provide improved protection for victims of trafficking. This would demonstrate there is real commitment towards ending sexual exploitation in Ireland.”

Rachel Moran, Founder, [Space International](#), said, “There is significant work ahead of the government and the Gardaí in successfully implementing this law and making people aware of the new legislation would be a good first step. People more broadly across our society need to know that it is now illegal to buy sexual access to another person.”

Sarah Benson, CEO, [Ruhama](#), said, “We have seen some relief among the women in street prostitution we support when they are reassured that they are no longer criminalised. While still very early days since the passage of the law, there is also some emerging evidence that women in prostitution seem more willing to report violent crimes committed against them.

“However, while this has been our experience to date, we have no official figures from the State on how the law is operating, and we are very concerned that through inaction we are missing a golden opportunity to tackle the demand from sex buyers that fuels Ireland’s inherently exploitative sex trade. In 2016 France introduced a similar law and by proactively implementing sanctions against sex buyers, (including on-the-spot fines) French police are positively working with the law in many key jurisdictions, especially Paris, to ensure it acts as a deterrent and reducing demand.”

Brian Killoran, CEO, [Immigrant Council of Ireland](#) added, “We know from the Swedish experience of criminalising the purchase of sex back in 1999 that the full positive impact of this type of law takes effect over time. Evidence shows it leads to a long-term reduction in demand. There has been a shift in societal attitudes and buying sex has become socially unacceptable.

“A key aim of this law is to better protect victims of sexual exploitation, including victims of trafficking for that purpose. The legislation cannot be fully effective without improved resourcing for supported, safe exit pathways and opportunities to reintegrate into society. We would urge for this process to be prioritised.”

Alan O’Neill, CEO, [Men’s Development Network](#), said, “Prostitution and trafficking exist in Ireland because there is a demand from some men to buy women for sex even though it is a form

of violence against women. All men in Ireland need to be aware that this is now illegal as enshrined in the Sexual Offences Act 2017."

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Note to editors

On Monday 27 March 2017 Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and most of Part 8 of the [Criminal Law \(Sexual Offences\) Act 2017](#) commenced.

The following organisations and individuals gathered at 10am today outside the Dáil in solidarity with victims of sexual exploitation to call for swifter implementation of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017.

- Sexual Exploitation Research Project, UCD
- Space International
- Ruhama
- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Children's Rights Alliance
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation
- One in Four
- Sexual Violence Centre Cork
- Doras Luimní

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Contacts:

Pippa Woolnough, [Immigrant Council of Ireland](#), Tel: 085 8640682, Email: pippa@immigrantcouncil.ie

Sarah Benson, [Ruhama](#), Tel: 086 600 3115