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**INDIAN BROTHEL OWNERS CONVICTED OF SEX TRAFFICKING, RAPE
IN LANDMARK KOLKATA CASE**

IJM commends Kolkata court as milestone convictions and sentencing puts a close to a four-year effort beginning with organization's 2009 rescue of sex trafficking victims

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 18, 2013) – International Justice Mission (IJM), a human rights agency that assists victims of violent oppression, lauded today that a district court (Haldia) near Kolkata convicted five (5) perpetrators of sex trafficking, including two brothel owners, two brothel managers and a pimp on charges ranging from human trafficking to rape.

On March 15, the Haldia court convicted two brothel owners, two brothel managers, one pimp of charges under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA) and the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC) ranging from detaining victims in a brothel, managing a brothel, to rape. One of the convicted brothel owners, Nakul Bera, notorious for owning a chain of brothels in this region, was convicted for both human trafficking and rape, an unprecedented conviction.

These convictions close a chapter of casework efforts by IJM's field office in Kolkata, efforts dating back to February 2009, when IJM's Indian national staff assisted state police in rescuing four young women from a brothel owned by Nakul Bera. In 2010, IJM assisted in another operation involving the rescue of twelve other trafficked victims, including minors, from a brothel in a nearby village.

During the trial of the first case, testimonies from three of Bera's victims detailed the extreme violence they faced. The survivors, represented by IJM, recounted stories being severely beaten when they refused to have sex with a customer, raped, and faced other methods of torture—and severely punished for any attempt to escape. In the second case trial, eight of the victims recounted incidents of torture in their court testimony against the brothel owners.

“Survivors from both these brothel rescue operations in 2009 and 2010 agreed to testify,” said Saju Mathew, IJM regional director of South Asia. “It is because of their brave testimonies, rooted by their conviction that it is only through putting the oppressors behind bars that hundreds and thousands of others like themselves would be safe, that justice was possible in Kolkata today.”

The five perpetrators were sentenced on March 16 by the court to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment along with a total fine of Rs.2,14,000 (approx. \$4,000 USD) all of which is to be paid to the victims as compensation in each case.

“This area is overrun with brothels and arrogant owners and managers who believe they'll never be caught let alone convicted. But today we shattered that mentality,” said public prosecutor Amal Ojha. “Those who once spit in the face of the law now tremble in fear of it. If you spread that fear it will give a message to other brothel owners that you can't do it anymore. You will get convicted.”

Bera was convicted of violating multiple sections of the ITPA and one section of the IPC including rape, managing a brothel, living off the earnings of prostitution, detaining a person in a brothel, and prostitution in a public place.

"We hope these cases can be positive examples for my country, as the police and court officials involved demonstrated competent knowledge of the law, sensitivity to trafficking survivors, and extreme dedication to justice," said IJM attorney Saptarshi Biswas, who provided legal counsel to the trafficking survivors in these cases. "Today, we proved that India's justice system not only can work, it does work."

Maya,* one of the survivors rescued from one of the brothels previously owned by Nakul Bera, now living independently, said she had only dared to dream about a day when Bera and the others would be convicted for their crimes. She added, "I also feel that the punishment should be *announced*, so that all the people doing the wrong things should get scared or frightened about doing these things."

*pseudonym

About International Justice Mission

International Justice Mission is a human rights agency that brings rescue to victims of slavery, sexual exploitation and other forms of violent oppression. IJM lawyers, investigators and aftercare professionals work in 16 communities in developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America with local officials to secure immediate victim rescue and aftercare, to prosecute perpetrators and to ensure that public justice systems - police, courts and laws - effectively protect the poor.

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