

Holyrood passes Human Trafficking law



A new law introducing life sentences for traffickers has been introduced in Scotland for the very first time.

The Scottish Parliament passed the Scottish Government's Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill yesterday evening.

It will clarify and strengthen criminal law by introducing a new single human trafficking offence to bring those responsible for human trafficking and exploitation to justice as well as guaranteeing victims support.

The Bill also:

- gives adult victims of trafficking rights to access support and assistance, similar to those already in place for child victims
- ensures instructions setting out how prosecutors should deal with the victims of trafficking and exploitation who are forced to commit crime as a direct result of their victim status
- strengthens protections for eligible vulnerable children by making independent child trafficking guardians available and requiring statutory referrals
- requires Scottish Ministers to work with other bodies to publish and keep under review a Scottish Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy

Justice Secretary Michael Matheson, said: "Victims of human trafficking and exploitation can face horrendous suffering and there is no place for it in modern society. That is why I am delighted that the new laws introduced by this Government will protect those subjected to these terrible crimes while

ensuring those who seek to peddle human misery face the toughest possible penalties.

“Scotland’s law enforcement agencies now have greater tools in their armoury to bring those responsible for human trafficking and exploitation to justice. Previously, criminal law against trafficking and exploitation was spread across different legislation but our new law will provide consistency and give our police and prosecutors a clearer set of guidelines around how to track down and prosecute criminals.

“We know, however, that legislation alone will not help to identify potential victims. That’s why, alongside these new laws, we’re also developing a Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy and building on the work already undertaken to increase public awareness, training for front-line staff and engagement with businesses to help spot the signs of potential trafficking and exploitation.

“Ultimately, our collective efforts are sending a strong signal that Scotland is a hostile place for those who seek to peddle human misery. We simply will not tolerate the trafficking and exploitation of vulnerable adults and children in this country.”

Police Scotland Deputy Chief Constable Iain Livingstone added:

“We welcome the new Human Trafficking legislation which we are confident will provide all agencies with the legislative framework to more effectively tackle this despicable crime and better support victims.

“Trafficking is challenging to identify in the many different forms it sadly exists, but also challenging and complex to prevent and to investigate. Most investigations are protracted and cross borders, nationally and internationally, as people are moved around.

“Those who are trafficked are extremely vulnerable and are at

risk of being exploited relentlessly by criminal gangs who prey on them for the sole purpose of making money.

“Trafficking is unacceptable. We will target those who trade in human beings and we will work with partners to ensure victims have the support they need.

“This new law sends a clear signal to those who choose to exploit and enslave others, that we are committed to ending this horrific crime and that we will pursue those responsible to bring them to justice.”

Ann Fehilly, Head of Strategic Services for Glasgow City Council’s TARA Service added: “Today is a major step forward in the effort to tackle human trafficking and exploitation in Scotland and we are particularly pleased that the new act will give us a legal basis on which to provide support and protection for survivors of human trafficking. This will be an invaluable tool in our work to encourage victims to come forward to seek protection and begin their journey from victims to survivors.”

John Merralls, Migrant Help’s UK head of human trafficking said: “We warmly welcome the Scottish Government’s action to address this horrific crime. It underlines their intent to pursue, prosecute and disrupt the criminals and the severe consequences they face. Migrant Help has been supporting the victims in Scotland since the implementation of the National Referral Mechanism in 2009 and we will continue to offer professional assistance to victims of human trafficking and exploitation.”