

MEDIA RELEASE

First conviction under the Trafficking in Persons Act

On 2nd November 2023, a jury returned unanimous verdicts of guilty, convicting Anthony Smith on all five counts of Trafficking of a Child. Mr Justice Henderson sentenced Anthony Smith in his absence for a term of fifteen (15) years on each count with the sentences to run concurrently and to begin on his arrest. Anthony Smith absconded after the second day of evidence at his trial. This case is the first trial for this offence in Trinidad and Tobago.

Smith was on trial on a five (5) count indictment that charged him with recruiting a 16 year old girl for the purpose of exploitation, to wit prostitution contrary to the Trafficking in Persons act, Chap 12:10 of the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago. The offences occurred during the period December 2014 to July 2015.

The jury heard that the 16-year-old girl was from a single-mother home with 5 children and that her mother struggled to make ends meet. She had to leave school and in searching for a job, responded to an advertisement for promotional girls and models in the classified ads in one of the daily newspapers. She was invited to an interview by Anthony Smith and was told that she would need to take off all her clothes to be photographed. This was when she was told the true nature of the work being offered which was selling sexual services. When she declined the offer, she was offered the job as a bartender in Smith's business and subsequently a place to stay in eastern Trinidad. Sometime after, Anthony Smith pleaded with the 16-year-old to help him with an important client, as he had no other available girls that day. She relented with her first client, a foreign national staying at a city hotel in the waterfront area of Port of Spain. The 16-year-old was required to continue sex work while she attended part-time school. She testified that her last client was a police officer. During the time that she worked for Smith, she was subjected to physical, emotional and sexual abuse from him.

In August 2015, the 16-year-old informed Anthony Smith of her decision to leave and was only allowed to leave that day with some of her belongings that could fit in two bags. She was forced to leave behind her puppy and her other belongings including her passport. Her passport eventually led to the arrest of Anthony Smith.

In September 2015, the police searched the premises in eastern Trinidad and met foreign sex workers and among many other things, the passport of the 16-year-old. The jury heard that the investigations of that passport by the Counter Trafficking Unit (CTU) of the TTPS led to the location of the child and the subsequent arrest and charges against the accused.

The indictment charging the accused was filed by the Director of Public Prosecutions on 1 February 2023 with the judiciary expediting the trial management of the proceedings. The first case management hearing before Justice Henderson was held on 17 February 2023. On 28 April, the matter was set for trial on 18 September 2023. The trial commenced on that date and after two days of evidence, the accused absconded. After hearing evidence and submissions, the trial continued in the absence of the accused ending with his conviction. The trial judge noting that this was the first case in Trinidad and Tobago commended the CTU, the State Prosecutors and the defence attorneys for their assistance. The Judge

directed the Registrar to forward the transcripts of the proceedings to the CTU, which contained evidence that members of the police service had sexual intercourse with the 16-year-old.

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