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## **Children's safety not negotiable when it comes to human trafficking**

The Ontario Native Women's Association is appalled by Justice Colin McKinnon's decision to not impose a mandatory minimum sentence that involved sexual violence against children.

On Thursday, the Ottawa judge is quoted as saying that to impose the mandatory minimum on the offender, Steevenson Joseph, would be "cruel and unusual punishment." Cora McGuire-Cyrette, Executive Director of ONWA said, "Justice McKinnon describes this offender as "naïve" but what about the naivety of the young girls he took advantage of – children who he violated and profited from! What type of message is this sending to others involved in the ugly world of human trafficking and child pornography? Children's safety is not negotiable when it comes to human trafficking."

Joseph was originally charged with two counts of human trafficking; however he was later convicted after a trial by jury of three prostitution-related offences, along with making and possessing child pornography. The crown attorney asked for a three-and-a-half year penitentiary term for Joseph, while the defence sought a suspended sentence. Justice McKinnon imposed a suspended sentence with one year probation.

ONWA President Dawn Lavell Harvard echoes McGuire - Cyrette's comments: "I am so outraged, by the sentencing by Judge McKinnon. Anyone under the age of 18, is a child. This is sexual violence against a minor. We cannot stand by and allow further harm to continue. All women and children have the right to safety."

This ruling raises a number of concerns as ONWA raises:

- Manipulation is a tactic often used by human traffickers to benefit them.
- Luring and grooming are a part of a process; that creates the illusion of choice.
- Existing policies, legislation and the judicial system must be re-evaluated when it comes to crimes of human trafficking
- Human Trafficking of Indigenous women and girls is an issue that is not well understood in Canada.
- Human Trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world, second only to the Drug trade.
- Human trafficking is happening everywhere globally, it happens in our own small towns, municipalities and Indigenous communities.

ONWA has been and continues to advocate for Anti-Human Trafficking. We are well aware of the issues that surround the criminal industry. The complex nature of traffickers, traps, and tactics that lure young girls for the purpose of exploitation.

### **For more information, please contact:**

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