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Two men convicted over online child sexual exploitation in Iligan

ILIGAN CITY, PHILIPPINES – A court in Iligan City sentenced two men to over 10 years in prison after they pleaded guilty to offenses related to the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children. Iligan City Regional Trial Court Branch 2 handed down the decisions on Feb. 9, 2023, after both men entered into plea agreements.

One of the accused was already convicted in 2021 for attempted trafficking, among others, which carries a penalty of fifteen years imprisonment and was serving his sentence for this first conviction. This month, he pleaded guilty to one count of use of trafficked persons and two counts of willfully accessing child sexual exploitative materials. He was ordered to serve up to 14 years, 4 months and 3 days in prison and pay a total of P450,000 in fines and P300,000 in civil indemnity.

The other accused also pleaded guilty to one count of attempted trafficking which carries a straight penalty of 15 years imprisonment, a fine amounting to P500,000, and civil indemnity amounting to P100,000 to be paid to each complainant. He also pleaded guilty to two counts of online sexual abuse and exploitation which carries a penalty of up to 10 years, a fine of P200,00, and civil indemnity amounting to Php100,000 for each complainant.

This second conviction originated from a November 16, 2022 operation by the Women and Children Protection Center Mindanao Field Unit (WCPC-MFU) in which local law enforcers implemented a warrant to Search, Seize, and Examine Computer Data (WSSECD). The operation also resulted in the arrest of the suspect and the rescue of two siblings who are both related to the suspect.

In these two convictions the court granted a Stay Away Order that prohibited the suspects from staying within a 50-meter radius of their victims upon their release from detention after service of sentence.

International Justice Mission (IJM), a non-government organization supporting the Philippine government against the online sexual exploitation of children, collaborated with public prosecutors in this case.

In reaction to the conviction, Deputy Regional Prosecutor, Karl Salcedo had this to say:

"The convictions are welcome news. It should serve as a reminder to the perpetrators and people who violate our laws protecting our women and children, that the government is serious in making the perpetrators answer for their offenses. This is also a testament to the effectiveness of the collaborative work between the government and non-government organizations, particularly the International Justice Mission here in region 10....continued"

“The IJM’s work is laudable, as they have taken an active role in the fight against TIP and OSAEC, particularly in region 10. Prosecutor Jasmine Diaz, who handled the case, is a firm believer of the plea-bargaining strategy, for good reason, as the same is resorted to for the best interest of the child victim. This strengthens even more, the Regional Anti-Trafficking Task Force 10, through the leadership of Regional Prosecutor Merlynn Uy, our desire to engage in more collaborative work in fighting TIP and OSAEC. Our collaboration with IJM should serve as a blueprint to future partnerships with NGO’s who have common interests in advocating against TIP and OSAEC.”

Atty Lucille Dejito, IJM Cebu Director further adds to his statement by saying that: *“Plea bargaining once again has proven to be an effective strategy in obtaining justice for the survivors of online sexual exploitation and still hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes. It is worth highlighting that aside from the prison sentence and hefty fines ordered by the court, the ‘Stay Away Order’ is also a big step forward in ensuring additional protection measures are taken for the survivors as they continue their journey towards restoration.”*

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About IJM

International Justice Mission is a global organization that protects people in poverty from violence. IJM partners with local authorities in 29 program offices in 17 countries to combat slavery, violence against women and children, and police abuse of power against people who are poor. IJM works with local authorities and governments to rescue and restore survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and help strengthen public justice systems so they can better protect people from violence.

Our 21 years of work in the Philippines led to a dramatic decrease in the prevalence of sex trafficking of children in bars and brothels—reductions ranging from 72%-86% in the cities where we partnered with local authorities. In 2016, IJM fully transitioned our program in the Philippines to combat online sexual exploitation of children, in particular the trafficking of children to create new child sexual abuse materials, including via livestreaming. We have assisted Philippine authorities in more than 308 operations, leading to the rescue of 1037 victims and arrest of 320 suspects of online sexual exploitation of children (first case dates to 2011).

Learn more: osec.IJM.org.