



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2 men to spend decades in prison for online sexual exploitation of children

ILIGAN CITY, PHILIPPINES – Two traffickers who sexually abused children for profit online were each sentenced to serve up to 35 years in prison and pay over P1 million in fines and damages. The Iligan City Regional Trial Court Branch 2 handed down its decisions after both men entered into plea agreements. They pleaded guilty in February 2023, but one of them had a prior conviction in November 2021, also through a plea agreement.

“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,” said Deputy Regional Prosecutor Karl Salcedo.

Both men were sentenced to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to attempted trafficking under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act. One of them faces additional imprisonment of up to 20 years for violating the newly passed Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act of 2022. The court also issued a Stay Away Order, prohibiting both men from being within 50 meters of their victims.

Prior to the latest conviction, Manuel (real name withheld to protect his victims’ identities) pleaded guilty to attempted trafficking on November 18, 2021. He was ordered to serve 15 years in prison and pay a P500,000 fine. In addition, he received a maximum combined prison sentence of up to 6 years after pleading guilty to offenses under the Anti-Child Pornography Act and the Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act.

On February 9, 2023, Manuel received an additional penalty of up to 14 years in prison after pleading guilty to using trafficked persons under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, as well as the willful access of child sexual abuse and exploitation material under the Anti-Child Pornography Act. Combined with his prior conviction in 2021, Manuel was ordered to pay a total of P1,050,000 in fines and P500,000 in damages to complainants.

Meanwhile, Sergio (real name withheld to protect his victims’ identities) pleaded guilty to one count of attempted trafficking and two counts of willfully accessing any form of child sexual abuse and exploitation material (CSAEM). In addition to his combined maximum sentence of 35 years, he was ordered to pay P900,000 in total fines and P400,000 in total damages to complainants.

Sergio was arrested on November 16, 2022, by members of the Women and Children Protection Center Mindanao Field Unit (WCPC-MFU) who executed a warrant to Search, Seize, and Examine Computer Data. The operation also led to the rescue of two siblings who were related to him.

Lawyer and IJM Cebu Field Office Director Lucille Dejito said of the convictions: “These strong convictions reinforce the message of deterrence in the community. The public justice system is working to hold these perpetrators accountable. We are also encouraged to see that the local government of Iligan City has done a remarkable work in leading the fight to combat online sexual exploitation of children in

their own locality by investing in trainings and directing resources to strengthen their infrastructure to respond to these cases.”

Salcedo added: “This is also a testament to the effectiveness of the collaborative work between the government and non-government organizations, particularly International Justice Mission, here in Region 10. 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 our desire at the Regional Anti-Trafficking Task Force 10, through the leadership of Regional Prosecutor Merlynn Uy, 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.”

To date, IJM has supported Philippine authorities in the conviction of more than 170 people for offenses related to the online sexual exploitation of children. IJM has also supported more than 300 operations, leading to the rescue of more than 1,000 victims. ###

Note to Editors:

- Under Philippine laws, the name and personal circumstances of the trafficked person or any other information tending to establish the identity of the trafficked person and his or her family shall not be disclosed to the public.
- Republic Act No. 11930, otherwise known as the “Anti Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Anti Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Materials Law” (R.A. No. 11930 or the OSAEC Law) lapsed into law on 30 July 2022 and repealed R.A. No. 9775, or the “Anti-Child Pornography Law of 2009.”
- The Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as the Luxembourg Guidelines, prescribes the use of the term “child sexual abuse material” or “child sexual exploitation material” instead of “child pornography”. Sexualized material that depicts or otherwise represents children is a representation, and a form, of child sexual abuse and should not be described as “pornography.”

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IJM’s Program Against Online Sexual Exploitation of Children

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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.

Learn more: osec.IJM.org.