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NEW YORK SEX TOUR OPERATOR FOUND GUILTY OF PROMOTING PROSTITUTION

NOW-NYC INVESTIGATES SIMILAR SEX TOURISM OPERATIONS ADVERTISED IN NEW YORK MAGAZINE

New York, May 25, 2007 –Manhattan-based sex tour operator Saeed Ahmed, who ran Jump Off Destinations, was found guilty in State Supreme Court on May 22nd of three counts of promoting prostitution in the third degree, a D Felony, under which he could be imprisoned for up to three years.

Saeed Ahmed operated “Jump Off Destinations,” a sex tour company that offered sex tours from New York to the Dominican Republic. He organized three levels of tours, and the numbers of “guaranteed” sex tour partners varied with each level. Jump Off Destinations is one of several other sex tour companies that advertise on Craig’s List. In February 2006, Equality Now, a fellow member of the New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition, brought this case to the attention of the Manhattan District Attorney’s office. The office was quick to respond to the case and Saeed Ahmed was arrested in May 2006 for violating New York state law that prohibits the promotion of prostitution.

This victory marks the first time the New York state law prohibiting the promotion of prostitution was used to successfully convict a sex tour operator. Lisa Friel, chief of the sex crimes bureau of the New York County District Attorney’s Office, prosecuted the case.

“Sex tourism, since it occurs in some of the world’s poorest countries, can seem like a distant problem to most New Yorkers. What people don’t realize is United States citizens make up 25% of sex tourists worldwide, and these sexual predators find tour operators right here in New York City,” said Sonia Ossorio, president of the National Organization for Women in New York City. “Human trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation is a huge problem in New York City. Traffickers bring women into the country to service the local sex market, and pimps like Ahmed send organize groups of men who want to prostitute women in third world countries.”

In a press conference yesterday, NOW-NYC announced a new phase in its campaign ***Ending the Business of Human Trafficking in New York City***. Aimed at ending newspapers and magazines’ reliance on advertisement revenue from illegal massage parlors, brothels, and sex tour operators, the women’s rights organization is asking local publications to stop doing business with the organized commercial sex industry by signing an anti-trafficking pledge ***Trafficking Free, NYC!***

“These ads provide buyers of commercial sex access to trafficked women anywhere in the world,” says Ossorio. “*The New York Press, The Village Voice* and *New York Magazine* regularly run ads for sex tour operators and sex tour websites cater to American pedophiles and sexual predators seeking sex with underage girls in places like the Dominican Republic and Thailand.”

According to NOW-NYC investigations, one such sex tour operation, ExoticRetreat.net, has advertised weekly in *New York Magazine*. The website offers adult vacation packages promising 24 hour companionship with women imported from Eastern Europe. Customers are explicitly assured that “hostesses understand the meaning of a ‘full service’ adult entertainment experience.” Basic packages include one woman; upgrades are available for an additional \$500 per woman, per night, and in addition to those living on-site, “non-affiliated ladies living on the island...are readily available upon request.”

Ahmed's conviction, and NOW-NYC's *Trafficking Free, NYC!* campaign follow on the heels of Governor Spitzer's announcement last week that the state of New York is tightening laws to fight human trafficking. Once this bill is active, sex tour operators like Saeed will face additional charges when prosecuted by local law enforcement. The new bill has a sex tour provision, making operating a sex tour business in New York a D non-violent felony. At the federal level, the Mann Act, makes the operation of sex tours in the US illegal.

What the law doesn't account for publications running ads for illegal sex tour operators. Ossorio says that is precisely what NOW-NYC's campaign hopes to address with appeals to decency, "To refuse an illegal ad just takes some common sense. We are here to put publications that are the marketing arm of the trafficking industry on notice."

The National Organization for Women is the nation's largest organization working to advance women's rights and improve women's lives. The New York City Chapter of NOW, founded in 1966, is the largest chapter in the country with 7,000 members locally and 35,000 statewide. NOW-NYC works to protect women's reproductive choices, end violence against women and eliminate sex discrimination in our schools, workplaces, and the justice system in New York.