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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

POLITICIAN AND [FREE-THEM] RELEASE STATEMENT SUPPORTING OPERATION NORTHERN SPOTLIGHT

Toronto, ON (Friday, February 7, 2014)- MP Joy Smith and one of Canada's leading advocacy groups against human trafficking congratulate police officers involved with "Operation Northern Spotlight".

"Operation Northern Spotlight" sends a positive message to Canadians that one girl enslaved in sexual exploitation is one girl too many and worth searching the country for," says Shae Invidiata, Founder, [free-them]. "The project encourages Canadians to educate themselves on the current situation at hand. Human trafficking is happening in cities all across the country, and law enforcement needs our support to continue to investigate and rescues victims of human trafficking."

[free-them], an organization committed to advocacy and awareness to fight human trafficking, is thrilled with the results of the Durham Regional Police's project. "Operation Northern Spotlight is a nation-wide effort involving 26 police teams in 32 cities. The project focused on identifying young women and girls who were coerced into the sex trade.

"The cooperation of each police service across the country sends a strong message to pimps and traffickers in Canada that the Canadian police are willing and able to use cross regional resources to locate and rescue victims," adds Invidiata. "In the process, they are arresting and laying charges on the exploiters of these coerced girls and women".

MP Joy Smith adds the following remarks:

"I personally thank and commend each of the 180 officers and support personnel involved in executing 'Operation Northern Spotlight', a two-day blitz on Jan. 22 and 23, 2014, involving police forces in thirty-two cities from Alberta to Nova Scotia. Because of these efforts, underage girls were rescued, some as young as 15-years old, and are no longer being sexually exploited by johns.

This Operation is an example of an effective approach to identify and rescue victims from sexual exploitation. Over 330 females were interviewed and offered support. There were 28 charges laid in total against human traffickers and eight arrests were made.

The rescue of underage victims during this operation outweighed the complaints of inconvenience made by some 'Sex Worker organizations', sending a strong message to human traffickers that our youth are not for sale. With this in mind, law enforcement across Canada must continue to use the tools available to them. The statement made last week by the Hon. Peter Mackay, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of

Canada, re-affirmed this position,” said MP Smith.

Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Peter MacKay released a statement assuring the public that prostitution laws are being looked into:

“While the administration of justice is a matter of provincial jurisdiction, Canadians expect criminal laws in this country to be properly enforced so long as they remain in force. The Supreme Court of Canada made very clear in its decision that the current laws with respect to prostitution were to remain in force for twelve months.”

The Minister of Justice went on to say that they are currently reviewing a range of options, and that doing nothing is not an option. The government will be taking action to ensure the safety of streets and communities.

“The goal of this police initiative was to find victims of human trafficking,” says Timea Nagy, Founder, Walk With Me Victim Services Canada. “According to a Sex Worker organization, it was a ‘major inconvenience and possible trauma and loss of income’ for some sex trade workers. Please tell that to the mother of a 15 years old victim who was rescued because of this operation. This action was not against sex workers, it was against the real enemy, human traffickers. If we could bank together to fight this, the issue would be resolved that much faster.”

[free-them]

[free-them] is a volunteer-based initiative dedicated to raising awareness and funds to abolish human trafficking in Canada and abroad. Founded in January 2010, [free-them] is committed to partnering with businesses, government and law enforcement to fight human trafficking (slavery today) through awareness, education, legislation and fundraising for front line organizations. For more information about [free-them], please log onto www.freethem.ca.

For media requests or to book an interview with [free-them], Shae Invidiata, Timea Nagy or MP Joy Smith, please contact:

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