

RAPAR

The Manchester-based Human Rights Organisation

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Supporters rally to keep Mary safe – as new report describes Government response to trafficking as “clueless”

- ***RAPAR Public Meeting to raise awareness of Mary's campaign and the wider issues around human trafficking – 7pm, Friday March 15th, Friends' Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester***
- ***Mary's MP Lucy Powell to send message of support to meeting***

RAPAR is holding a public meeting on Friday, March 15th, to highlight the case of Mary Adenugba, who has been in the UK since 2004 and survived years of abuse and exploitation by traffickers before she finally escaped.

Mary, who is from Nigeria, was enslaved in the UK and forced to work as a prostitute in London and Manchester. She is now in the process of seeking asylum and is appealing against the UK Border Agency's decision to refuse her case.

Astonishingly, this decision was made despite the fact that the UKBA has accepted that Mary was trafficked. Her story has also been confirmed by the Eaves' Poppy Project, which specialises in support, advocacy and housing for women who have been trafficked.

As well as focussing on Mary's campaign, the public meeting will look at the wider issue of people trafficked to the UK, often by large networks of organised crime. The meeting comes in the week when a major study entitled “It Happens Here” was published by the Centre for Social Justice.

The 224 page report is scathing in its criticism of the lack of awareness about trafficking amongst front-line officials, saying: “We have encountered unacceptable levels of ignorance and misidentification of victims among the police, social services, UKBA, the judicial system and others.”

It adds that the response by Government ministers to trafficking, both into and within the UK, has been “clueless” and demands better education for police officers and social workers to help them identify people who have been trafficked and offer them the necessary support.

Often, people who have been trafficked are prosecuted for immigration offences instead of being given the help they require. RAPAR'S own experience of Greater Manchester Police's response to trafficking complaints reflects the concerns expressed in the report. Dr Rhetta Moran, of RAPAR, said: “Mary has shown great courage in speaking about what has happened to her. Many people who have been trafficked are too afraid to seek help.

“Three years ago, Mary was brought to RAPAR after she was found wandering the streets of Manchester when she finally managed to escape from the people who were abusing and exploiting her. She was destitute and desperate with nowhere to turn. Since then, she has started to re-build her life but her experiences have left her very vulnerable and with serious mental health problems.”

Mary has no contact with her remaining family in Nigeria who victimised her for becoming a Christian. If she was forced to return, she would have no access to support or medical services and she is likely to be targeted by traffickers again.

Friends and supporters include the Rev Jane Barraclough, minister at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, where Mary is a member of the congregation, the community branch of the union Unite, and Manchester Community Choir.

Figures show around 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year for sexual exploitation, begging and forced labour. Nigeria has a major problem with human trafficking, both internal and across international borders, including Europe.

Language barriers, fear of their captors, and the frequency with which they are moved around make it difficult to track down people who have been trafficked - and also the perpetrators of this extreme form of exploitation.

Mary says: “I am terrified that I will be sent back to Nigeria but I know my friends will do as much as they can to help keep me safe.”

- Mary's appeal hearing will be held on Friday, 10th May, 10 am at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal Offices in Moseley Street, Manchester.

**For more information, please contact
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For more details about Mary's campaign, go to www.rapar.org.uk