

**BHATT MURPHY SOLICITORS**  
**PRESS RELEASE**  
**20 May 2011**  
(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

**MET FAILED VICTIMS OF CHILD SLAVERY**

A High Court Judge has today declared that the Metropolitan Police Service ('MPS') violated the human rights of four victims of human trafficking and child slavery by failing to investigate the alleged perpetrators when asked to do so in 2007. In a landmark judgment<sup>[1]</sup>, Mr Justice Wyn Williams found that police owe a duty under the Human Rights Act to investigate credible allegations of ongoing or past servitude. This will apply to police forces throughout England and Wales. In failing to investigate, the court found the MPS to have breached the victims' rights under Articles 3 and 4 of the European Convention of Human Rights. The victims were also awarded a total of £20,000 plus costs for the distress caused to them by the MPS' failure to investigate their abusers.

The victims were trafficked into this country from Nigeria when they were 11 to 15 years old. They were forced to work as unpaid servants for families in North London and subjected to serious physical and emotional abuse. By the time they escaped their abusers and approached the police for help they were young adults. One of the victims (RTF) sought help while she was still in servitude in 2004. The other victims did so in 2007 after they had escaped servitude, with the help of Hackney Community Law Centre ("HCLC") and Africans Unite Against Child Abuse ("AFRUCA").

This judgment follows separate litigation by one of the victims (RTF<sup>[2]</sup>) against the MPS and the London Borough of Enfield ("LBE") regarding their alleged failure to investigate her abusers in 2004. That claim settled out of court in 2010/2011 without admissions of liability but in return for LBE and the MPS paying RTF substantial damages. The MPS also provided RTF with an apology dated 12 January 2010 for its failure to investigate in 2004.

The MPS has not apologised to any of the victims for failing to investigate their abusers in 2007. Instead it argued unsuccessfully in court that it did not owe a legal duty to investigate credible allegations of servitude unless those allegations were reported whilst the servitude was ongoing. MPS lawyers also tried to blame the victims in court for the lack of an investigation by suggesting that they had failed to cooperate with the police. This suggestion was roundly rejected by Mr Justice Wyn Williams, describing it as "wholly improbable"<sup>[3]</sup>. The MPS persisted in making this allegation even about RTF, despite the letter of apology it offered to her on 12 January 2010. This stance by the Commissioner of the Police for the Metropolis left Wyn Williams J "mystified".<sup>[4]</sup> He

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<sup>[1]</sup> Paragraph 148 of the judgment

<sup>[2]</sup> The Claimants cannot be identified pursuant to a court order

<sup>[3]</sup> Paragraph 89 of the judgment

<sup>[4]</sup> Paragraph 51 of the judgment

accepted the victims' accounts "without hesitation"<sup>[5]</sup> and rejected key aspects of senior officers' evidence<sup>[6]</sup>.

**RTF** said:

*"It took all the courage I had to walk into Southgate police station and Enfield Social Services to ask for help in 2004 but they sent me back to my abusers and then blamed me".*

Another victim and claimant, **OOA**, said:

*"When I got away from my abusers, I went to Walworth Road police station in 2007. I told a police officer that I had been beaten unconscious but he did nothing".*

**OOO** and **MTK** said: *"Why did the police not help us, why did our lives not matter, is it because we were not born in this country?"*

**Debbie Ariyo**, Executive Director and Founder of **AFRUCA** said:

*"I applaud the courage of these women and hope this judgment will result in victims of slavery receiving the support they so desperately need from the authorities."*

**Nathaniel Matthews** of **HCLC**

*"It is a depressingly familiar pattern to see victims of crime blamed for the failings of the criminal justice system. We have seen this happen with rape victims, the mentally ill and now with trafficking victims."*

The victims' solicitor, **Tony Murphy** of **Bhatt Murphy** said as follows:

*"The Commissioner should not require a court judgment to appreciate the importance of investigating child slavery. His decision to fight this case sends a dangerous message to officers that combating human trafficking is not a priority for the Met. "*

## **Notes to Editor**

- An approved copy of Wyn Williams J's judgment is **attached**
- The trial of this claim was heard at the High Court in London from 7-11 and 15 March to 2011. The Claimants were represented by Phillippa Kaufmann QC
- Judgment was formally handed down at Cardiff Crown Court on 20 May 2011 as Wyn Williams J is currently sitting at that court

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<sup>[5]</sup> Paragraph 29 of the judgment

<sup>[6]</sup> Paragraphs 99 and 177 of the judgment

- The text of the apology extended to RTF by the MPS on 12 January 2010 is **attached**.
- The MPS finally agreed to undertake an investigation into the claimants' abuse in 2009 under threat of judicial review from Bhatt Murphy. The MPS began by investigating OOA's abusers. This led to the conviction of Lucy Adeniji at Isleworth Crown Court on 11 February 2011 and her sentencing on 18 March 2011.
- **Requests for interviews should be emailed to [t.murphy@bhattmurphy.co.uk](mailto:t.murphy@bhattmurphy.co.uk); and/ or [Debbie@afuca.org](mailto:Debbie@afuca.org); and/or [nathaniel@hclc.org.uk](mailto:nathaniel@hclc.org.uk) (as applicable)**

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