

Convergence Resource Center, Human trafficking Educators working with Men and boys to stand Against the Demand:

Posted on Thursday, Dec 30, 2021

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MILWAUKEE (Dec. 29, 2021) – Debbie Lassiter and Arnold Cifax issued the following statements in response to today’s conviction of Ghislaine Maxwell on human trafficking charges. Maxwell, 59, was convicted on five of six federal counts , including sex trafficking of minors, transporting a minor with the intent to engage in criminal sexual activity and three related counts of conspiracy. She was acquitted of enticing a minor to travel to engage in illegal sex acts. Maxwell faces up to 65 years in prison.

“Several of the witnesses who gave detailed, compelling testimony were vulnerable teenagers between the ages of 14 and 18 when they were trafficked. Some came from wealthy families, others from middle-class families or single-parent families. Their trauma was real and illustrates that anyone could become a human trafficking victim given the right circumstances of a manipulative adult or authority figure preying on the weaknesses or unmet needs of an individual.

Unfortunately, we see this type of manipulation play out everyday across the nation – in big cities, suburbs, small towns, rural and tribal areas. The victims are girls and boys, women and men, LBGTQ individuals and those with disabilities. Victims come from all races, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds.”

— *Debbie Lassiter, D. Div., co-founder and CEO of Convergence Resource Center (CRC), a faith-based nonprofit community service organization helping women rebuild their lives after trauma with an emphasis on female survivors of human*

trafficking and those who have been incarcerated.

“This case caught the public’s attention because it involved rich and powerful people taking advantage of underage girls for sexual pleasure. Everyone knows that’s wrong and it’s a crime.

“Sex trafficking is a demand-based business. We can put a dent in that demand by standing up and saying, “not on my block, not in my neighborhood, not in my community.” That’s what HEMAD is all about – men influencing other men – in their neighborhood, at work, at the gym, at church or anywhere. There is great power to do good, protect the vulnerable among us and rid our community of this evil by standing together and saying, “no more!”

“We see this by the way HEMAD has grown – from 3,000 men taking a pledge three years ago, to more than 30,000 a year later, and more than 50,000 last year in the middle of a pandemic. Our goal is to have 75,000 men join this cause this year. Maybe this case and others like it will convince men to join us.”

*— Arnold Cifax, youth pastor at New Testament Church and a CRC board member. He leads HEMAD (**H**uman trafficking **E**ducators working with **M**en and boys to stand **A**gainst the **D**emand), an initiative that asks men to take a public stand against human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of adults and children.*