

Muslim sentenced to life for operating child sex trafficking ring

"In the midst of the heated debate over whether to bring thousands of Muslim refugees into the United States, a federal case against a follower of Islam landed him in prison for the rest of his life this week.

Shahid Hassan Muslim, aka "Sharp," 33, was sentenced this week to life in prison for operating an extensive sex trafficking enterprise that recruited women and girls – some as young as 16 years old – into prostitution.

The sentence was announced by Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta, head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, U.S. Attorney Jill Westmoreland Rose of the Western District of North Carolina, Special Agent in Charge John A. Strong of the FBI's Charlotte Division and Special Agent in Charge Nick S. Annan of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcements Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Atlanta Division.

In sentencing Muslim, U.S. District Court Judge Robert Conrad Jr. of the Western District of North Carolina also ordered him to pay \$13,840 in restitution to the victims of the two sex trafficking counts, which charged Muslim with the sex trafficking of those victims for periods of two months and three months, respectively. On Aug. 11, 2014, a federal jury found Muslim guilty on all counts, including two counts of sex trafficking, one count of kidnapping, one count of production of child pornography, one count of witness tampering and five counts of promoting a prostitution business enterprise.

Evidence presented during Muslim's four-day trial, including the testimony of five victims, revealed that Muslim's sex

trafficking enterprise operated in Charlotte, North Carolina, and other cities from at least 2010 until his arrest in November 2013. As established by the evidence presented at trial, Muslim recruited vulnerable young women and girls from the Charlotte area and advertised them for prostitution on the internet. He lured them into his scheme by promising that they would be part of a "family" when they had none. Once the women and girls were a part of his enterprise, Muslim demanded all of their proceeds and used brutal violence to control them. As one witness explained, he never hit the victims in the face because it would damage his "merchandise."

According to the evidence established at trial, Muslim accused one teenage victim of withholding money from him and then proceeded to handcuff and beat her until she admitted to keeping some of her earnings. Muslim's assaults on other victims included burning one victim's leg with a cigarette to teach her a lesson; and punching a third victim in the stomach, without warning, as she balanced with her eyes closed during a "DUI test" he forced her to perform. After punching her in the stomach, Muslim then dragged her by her hair to a bathroom and repeatedly punched her until she vomited.

The evidence further showed that Muslim kidnapped one of the victims and viciously beat her after she left and reported him to the police. Witnesses testified that he lured her to a hotel, pretending to be a customer, then attacked her and shoved her into a storage trunk. After transporting the trunk to his house, he handcuffed her, bound her feet and continued to beat her, breaking a toilet in the process. Muslim then left her in the shower – still handcuffed – overnight with cold water running on her until she managed to escape and report the kidnapping to a neighbor the next day.

The evidence also demonstrated that Muslim continued his efforts to intimidate and control the victims even after his arrests on both federal and state charges. He convinced the kidnapping victim to submit a false affidavit declaring his

innocence, resulting in dismissal of state charges. He further harassed a victim in the federal case to submit a false affidavit regarding a sexually explicit video that he produced of her when she was 16 years old.

"This defendant preyed on and abused vulnerable young women by running a violent sex trafficking operation," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Gupta. "While no amount of jail time can undo the harm he caused and the trauma he inflicted, this sentence sends a clear message that people who engage in human trafficking and violate the most basic standards of human decency will face the full force of justice."

"Shahid Muslim is a ruthless predator who used lies to lure vulnerable young women and underage girls into his criminal enterprise," said U.S. Attorney Rose. "But instead of finding the better life his young victims had been promised, they endured unspeakable violence and exploitation in the hands of Muslim for his financial gain. My office will continue to aggressively prosecute those who engage in this illegal business that dehumanizes victims and strips them of their dignity."

"Shahid Muslim promised his victims the loving support of a family, instead he controlled them through beatings, fear, and intimidation," said Special Agent in Charge Strong. "The FBI devotes a significant amount of resources to helping sex trafficking victims recover from the trauma they suffer at the hands of ruthless people like Muslim. Today's sentence is a stark warning, there is a harsh punishment for those who choose to sacrifice another person's civil rights and freedom for their own profit."

"Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery that Homeland Security Investigations fights as one of its highest priorities via a coordinated global effort with our law enforcement partners," said Special Agent in Charge Annan.

“The sadistic abuse inflicted by this defendant is unspeakable and hopefully victims can now find some relief in knowing the monster who exploited them will be safely locked away for many years.”

© 2016 NWV – All Rights Reserved