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Press Release

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Two 14-year-old minor girls earlier rescued in February, rescued again last night.

The connivance of CWC, Police Machinery along with other government agencies in league with the traffickers make a mockery of the Government of India's initiative of *Beti Bachhao, Beti Padhao*. We demand a State CID probe.

#ProtectHerEmpowerHer

It may be recalled **Harmony Foundation coordinated and facilitated the rescue of two minor girls aged 14 years on 2nd February 2018** in Sangli-Islampur City (FIR No.53/2018 U/S IPC 370(A) PITA U/s 3,4,5 and Pocsu U/s 12(15) etc).

Within two weeks of their rescue, the minor girls were sent back again to the brothels in spite of the POCSO Act being filed against the perpetrators. Fake Aadhar cards were submitted to depict their age as adults who have entered the flesh trade willingly and without compulsion. Documents such as school certificates are available with us as proof that the victims are minors. We had written to the DG of Police on 9th March 2018 seeking a State CID inquiry into this whole shameful episode but nothing has been done till date.

Our field team did a meticulous job of tracking down the two girls with great difficulty and found out that after their release from the Government shelter home in Karad, they were forced back into the brothels in a different district- this time in Sholapur. We contacted DCP Poornima Chaugule who was extremely helpful in giving us the support needed for the raid and we were able to rescue three girls out of which one was the 14-year-old who was rescued earlier in February. On interrogation, this girl told that her friend (the other 14-year-old rescued along with her in February) has been shifted to another brothel around 80 kms away in Temburni in Sholapur Rural. While our team proceeded to rescue the other minor holed up in Temburni, some junior policemen leaked out the information about our movement and when we reached the place we were unable to find the girl as

she was hastily shifted to another location. It was a harrowing search for almost four hours and with the sincere help of SP Viresh Prabhu that we managed to locate and rescue the other 14-year-old minor. **Finally, FIR was registered (FIR No: 230/2018) under various sections of IPC and POCSO Act.**

It is imperative that a high-level enquiry be initiated and stringent action be taken against the conspirators of this wicked act at a time when the POCSO Act has been amended to include the death sentence for the rape of minors. This act of connivance between all the conspirators involved is a thorough mockery of the government's initiative of *Beti Bachao Beti Pado*. It is heartbreaking that these girls who are supposed to be in school, are being exploited in a brothel with no hope for their future.

There is always a thunderous uproar that engulfs the nation whenever rape and subsequent murder of a minor girl is reported. Don't we need to empathize with these victims as we do with the victims of Kathua, Unnao, Surat, Etah? Don't we need to take this up as these minor girls are forced into prostitution and are raped multiple times on a daily basis and their very dignity denigrated regularly for monetary gains by the pimps? It is shocking to witness the insensitivity of the Police in the wake of such heinous crimes. We cannot afford to keep quiet; we must arise and create an uproar that cannot be silenced till justice is served and action taken against the erring government machinery including the police.

We need to create nation-wide awareness against this gross, heinous crime against minor girls. An aggressive campaign must also be mounted by the civil society condemning and outlawing this menace. If no action is initiated against the erring officials in the next 48 hours, **Harmony Brigade, an initiative of Harmony Foundation consisting of a panel of women lawyers would be compelled to move a Writ Petition in the High Court.**

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