CRIME GANG ARRESTED IN JOINT EUROPEAN OPERATION

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News Article

Detectives from the Police Service of North Ireland’s (PSNI) Organised Crime Branch have arrested two suspects and rescued potential victims as part of a joint operation with Swedish police, which was supported by Europol, into a human trafficking crime gang suspected of operating in Northern Ireland and Sweden.

The arrests were made during a number of searches in the greater Belfast area on Thursday 25 April. Police believe some of the premises were being used as brothels.

Officers from Sweden and Northern Ireland have been working together in the search, rescue and arrest activity, codenamed Operation Burgrave, for a number of months, and have rescued a number of potential victims. Two of the potential victims were rescued in Northern Ireland.

The suspects arrested in Northern Ireland, aged 27 and 20, are due to appear at Belfast Crown Court this afternoon, Friday 26 April, on foot of European Arrest Warrants.

Swedish police have obtained European Arrest Warrants for the suspects and, subject to court approval, they will be flown to Stockholm to face charges there. The PSNI investigation will continue while legal proceedings are conducted in Sweden.

Operation Burgrave is an investigation into an organised crime group suspected of involvement in controlling prostitution and human trafficking in Northern Ireland and Sweden. PSNI detectives are also conducting inquiries into suspected money laundering.

This operation has been made possible through a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) agreement between the UK and Sweden - Eurojust has partly funded the operation. The operation has been assisted and supported by Europol, and PSNI and Swedish police are liaising with law enforcement authorities in Romania.

The potential victims have been taken to a place of safety where they are being interviewed by specially trained officers.

A number of items including documents, phones and computers have been removed for detailed
examination by investigators.

The officer in charge of the PSNI Organised Crime Branch investigation, Detective Chief Inspector Douglas Grant, said: "Working with law enforcement colleagues in various parts of Europe, we believe we have halted the activities of an organised crime gang involved in controlling prostitution and human trafficking in Northern Ireland, Sweden and Romania.

“The Joint Investigation Team agreement between the UK and Sweden was reached with the assistance of PPS prosecutors and has enabled our teams of officers to progress inquiries and activity more quickly and effectively. Much work remains to be progressed but we believe the action in Northern Ireland, Sweden and Romania has provided important momentum to our collective efforts.”

A spokesperson for Eurojust added: "Eurojust is pleased to have assisted in the co-ordination of judicial and police actions through the arranging of a Joint Investigation Team Agreement between the Kingdom of Sweden and the United Kingdom.

This has facilitated the investigations into cross-border criminality and led to a successful conclusion."

A spokesperson for Europol said: “Europol’s contribution to this pan-European trafficking case included the provision of operational analytical support, cross-match reports and participation in coordination meetings. Europol continues to support the operation with the aim of identifying the scope of organised criminal activity.”

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