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## **Prison for prominent predator's live online child sex shows**

A prison sentence handed down today to 75-year-old former North Shore Community Board Chair Martin Lawes, for sustained child sexual exploitation of impoverished children in the Philippines, has been welcomed by child advocacy group Stop Demand.

Stop Demand's founder and barrister Denise Ritchie, who attended today's sentencing at the Auckland High Court, said the case set an important precedent for future cases of this nature.

After deductions from a ten year starting point, Justice Wylie sentenced Lawes to four and a half years in prison for "dealing in people under 18 for sexual exploitation", and two years each on charges of importation and possession of objectionable material, to be served concurrently.

Denise Ritchie says, *"We are pleased the final sentence was greater than two years, which left no room for Lawes to seek leave to apply for home detention. Prison for someone of his previous high standing, and age, sends a strong message that the Courts will not be lenient on such crimes, and that children everywhere deserve protection and justice."*

She adds, *"The case is a reminder that sexual predators of children come from all walks of life including those who hold positions of power, privilege and wealth. Sexually preying on children is a vile crime, but to use your wealth to prey on vulnerable children in impoverished countries like the Philippines, is particularly despicable."*

Between 2008 and 2017, Lawes sent some \$100,000 to leaders of a Philippines-run child-sex ring. In return, children were forced into live streaming sex acts at Lawes' direction, and for his sexual gratification. Victims were girls aged as young as 7; while those found in his separate stash of child sexual abuse material appeared to be as young as 3 years old.

Lawes, a multi-millionaire, earlier told New Zealand law enforcement that the money was not significant, that he was helping people living in poverty and that he was in fact the victim.

During sentencing, Justice Wylie acknowledged how degrading and dehumanizing the crimes were for the victims and the harm that will have been done to them. The judge noted that it was predators like Lawes who fuel the global online child sex trade, a point welcomed by Stop Demand. As Ritchie says, *"If there were no demand, there would be no supply of children."*

Stop Demand says this case highlights the superb collaborative work and dedication by the FBI who initially uncovered Lawes' offending, then by the New Zealand Police and Customs, with cooperation by the Philippines enforcement agencies.

Five adults have been arrested in the Philippines for running the ring, with 12 girls rescued.

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