

Ex-charity worker convicted of giving unlawful immigration advice

Alexandra Zernova, sole Director of London City Associates and former employee of charity Solicitors International Human Rights Group, (SIHRG), appeared at Westminster Magistrates' Court on Monday 13 January for sentencing following a successful prosecution brought by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC).

Ms Zernova of London, had pleaded guilty on 13 January 2020 to seven charges of providing unlawful immigration advice through her company London City Associates. At sentencing she was fined £3,500 and ordered to pay £2,000 costs.

The offences occurred whilst Ms Zernova was working as an education and training officer at SIHRG. Following Ms Zernova's departure from SIHRG, the charity became aware she had been providing illegal immigration advice and alerted the OISC.

Upon sentencing the Magistrate said:

"You knew that you were not to provide these services. That is for good reason...Those who seek immigration services are often the most vulnerable. You know about these things as you trained in this, you are trained about clients, about their vulnerabilities and about the duty on us as a profession to abide by the highest standards of ethics towards our clients. You did not do that.

"The offences are aggravated by it being over a number of years with several distinct clients. There is no guidance on sentencing for such an offence. I have noted the aggravating features as I see them, but also the fact that you have cooperated as far as I can tell, and your guilty plea at the earliest opportunity. I will deal with you by way of a fine. This is the first time I do so with one of these cases. I take these offences seriously, as it undermines the legal protections in this country."

John Tuckett, OISC Commissioner said:

"Immigration services are regulated to protect some of the most vulnerable in our society and to ensure people are getting the advice they need. This is why all immigration advisers must be registered by the OISC or be a qualified lawyer to ensure they meet standards in knowledge and ethics.

"We are pleased with today's result, and that we have been able to bring forward another successful prosecution. However the length of time Ms Zernova was able to operate illegally reinforces the importance of people or organisations like the SIHRG coming forward and reporting knowledge of poor or illegal immigration advice to the OISC."