



British, Irish women held in Peru `were forced to smuggle`

Posted on 14 August 2013 - 06:03pm

Last updated on 14 August 2013 - 06:51pm

LONDON (Aug 14, 2013): Two young women from Britain and Ireland who were caught in Peru with cocaine worth millions of dollars claim that gangsters in Ibiza forced them at gunpoint to become drug mules, in comments published on Wednesday.

Melissa Reid, 19, and Michaela McCollum Connolly, 20, told Britain's Daily Mirror newspaper that a British mobster snared them on the streets of the Spanish party island, where they were working for the summer.

The pair were arrested on March 6 while trying to board a flight from Lima to Spain, after customs officials found 11 kilos (24 pounds) of cocaine, worth an estimated \$2.3 million (1.8 million euros), hidden in food packets in their luggage.

"We were given no option," said Reid, who is from Lenzie near the Scottish city of Glasgow.

"If we didn't do as we were told we would be dead. We were not smuggling for money, we were smuggling for our lives."

The women, who are being held at a police station in Lima, told the paper that gangsters kidnapped them and took them to a "safe house" on the Spanish island of Majorca.

They put loaded guns to their heads, robbed them of their passports and mobile phones and threatened them with death if they did not fly out to Peru, they added.

Once in South America, they were ordered to carry the cocaine, they said.

"We have no doubt they would have killed us both without hesitation if we didn't do as we were told," Reid said.

The pair said the gangsters had information on their families, who would be threatened if they failed to obey orders.

Possession of more than 10 kilogrammes of cocaine carries a maximum prison sentence of 15 years in Peru.

McCollum Connolly is from County Tyrone in the British province of Northern Ireland, but is travelling on an Irish passport.

She had sparked a massive online campaign, backed by Irish sports stars, after she went missing from Ibiza, only to turn up two weeks later in the hands of Peruvian authorities. – *AFP*