

Former IMF chief Strauss-Kahn acquitted in pimping trial

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Lille, France: Former International Monetary Fund chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn was cleared of pimping charges on Friday in France, putting an end to four years of legal drama that began with a sexual assault charge in a New York hotel room.

Strauss-Kahn's trial on aggravated pimping charges in the northern city of Lille hinged on sex parties that took place in the midst of the global financial crisis.

Strauss-Kahn had told the court the parties were much-needed "recreational sessions" at a time of intense pressure to steer the world through economic peril, and he did not know the women who took part were prostitutes. In often sordid testimony, the women described sometimes-brutal nights that, they said, were not fun for them at all.

The verdict was the last step in four years of legal drama for Strauss-Kahn that began when a New York hotel maid accused him of sexual assault in 2011, killing his ambitions to be French president. That case was later settled out of court.

Strauss-Kahn, 66, was among more than a dozen defendants, including hotel managers, entrepreneurs, a lawyer and a police chief. They were accused of participating in or organizing collective sexual encounters in Paris, Washington and in the Brussels region in 2008-2011, when Strauss-Kahn was IMF chief and married. Only one, a hotel manager, was convicted in the pimping case.

Each faced up to 10 years in prison and \$1.5 million in fines if convicted.

During the three-week trial in February, the man known in France as DSK never wavered in his insistence that he did not know that the young women at the parties were prostitutes. He said he thought they were simply "libertine."

The sometimes tearful testimony of two prostitutes cast a harsh light on Strauss-Kahn's sexual practices. But they testified that they had never told him directly about their professions.

Other defendants described how they had voluntarily erected a wall of silence around their powerful friend to protect him from embarrassment.

Even the prosecutor, unusually, asked for Strauss-Kahn's acquittal, saying the trial did not back up the charge of aggravated pimping, which requires proof that he promoted or profited from prostitution. However, the prosecutor asked for conviction of the co-defendants who admitted having organized these evenings and paid the girls.