

Press Statement Issued by SWEAT, Sisonke Sex Workers Movement and TB/HIV Care Association

Civil Society are concerns about the nature of sensationalism by the Daily Voice article - "Land of hookers and Aids – Blikkiesdorp's prossies reveal shocking lives"

Sex Workers Education and Advocacy taskforce (SWEAT), Sisonke Sex Workers Movement and TB/HIV Care Association are concerned by the tone and ramifications of the Daily Voice article published on 17 June 2014 titled: "Land of hookers and Aids – *Blikkiesdorp's prossies reveal shocking lives.*"

The article stated that *"Blikkiesdorp, created by Western Cape Premier Helen Zille, is nothing more than a gang-infested slum of nearly 15000 people rife with crime and prostitution."*

"Today, girls as young as 12 are selling their bodies for sex to feed their drug addiction and occasionally put food on the table," said the article.

The article further claims that, *"a Daily Voice investigation revealed many of the sex workers are HIV-positive."*

As organisations working directly with sex workers to provide a comprehensive health and human rights package of services, we are concerned about the exaggerated claims and the sensationalist nature of the article, as it might further increase stigma and violence against a marginalised group who already experience high levels of human rights violations.

SWEAT and Sisonke's work focuses on adult sex workers who enter and work in the industry voluntarily. We provide direct services to sex workers, facilitate capacity building and support sex workers in accessing their human rights in a criminalised system whilst simultaneously advocating for the decriminalisation of sex work in South Africa.

Together with TB/HIV Care Association, we run several programs and services such as outreach programs for both indoors and outdoors sex workers, mobile health clinics, and counselling.

TB/HIV Care Association representative Andrew Lambert stated that "TB/HIV Care's mobile health outreach teams have been providing safe, non-discriminatory health services to sex workers in the Blikkiesdorp community since 2013 and have seen increased trust built with sex workers in the area. More and more are coming forward for HIV prevention, counselling, health and wellness services."

"Articles such as this can reverse this work, pushing these hard to reach, marginalised sex workers back into the shadows and making health outcomes worse, both for the sex workers and for the general community," said Lambert.

SWEAT's Director, Sally-Jean Shackleton highlights the widespread poverty problem trickling the country, she states that, "the increasingly feminised nature of poverty means all women living in Blikkiesdorp, not only sex workers, are subject to violence and abuse."

"Sex workers however, have additional burdens – they are stigmatised by their own communities and alienated from police because they are criminalised," says Shackleton.

Leigh Davids, a transgender sex worker and a resident of Blikkiesdorp, responded to the allegations and said that the article shouldn't focus on sex workers living with HIV, but the area they have been relocated to.

"Blikkiesdorp is an unsafe and unhealthy place for us living with HIV, the taps and toilets are outside, and its winter and constantly raining, our health are at stake."

Sex workers requiring SWEAT's services can visit our office at 19 Anson Road, Observatory for direct services with our peer educators and counselors or call our toll-free helpline number: 0800 606060.

For more info contact:

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