

**APNSW statement at 7<sup>th</sup> International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific, Kobe, Japan**

*July 5, 2005*

Please forward widely

This morning at the closing ceremony of the Seventh International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific Maria-san and Andrew of the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) talked about sex workers' experience of the conference. The opportunity for sex workers from twenty countries throughout the region to come together again. We had a lot to celebrate. The APNSW and the Japanese sex workers movement were both founded here in Japan in Yokohama in 1994. Now as then our Japanese sex worker colleagues were wonderful hosts organizing cultural events that ensured that male, female and transgender sex workers were the stars of the day.

Maria-san proudly announced that the Asia Pacific Transgender Network, which is sponsored by the APNSW.

However, this was a silver lining. Andrew Hunter spoke about the black cloud that hung over the entire conference.

"The theme of this conference was to be bridging science and community. But it seems that many at this conference have been ignoring the scientific evidence about what works in HIV prevention and care for sex workers. And unfortunately, large parts of the community are complicit in ignoring it.

"The US government policy that requires organizations working in HIV prevention to sign a pledge opposing sex work is rolling back fifteen years of building capacity and knowledge in programming and research.

"This conference was an opportunity for those of us who know what works and who respect the human rights of the most vulnerable to speak out. Between now and the 8th ICAAP in Sri Lanka, let us keep in mind that this has not happened. We have these questions which need to be solved for the next ICAAP in Sri Lanka:

- "Why were abstracts about rights based approaches to sex work not accepted?"
- "Why were the real issues of sex workers censored from the conference newsletter?"
- "Why were there so few scholarships for sex workers?"
- "Why did NGOs whose staff had presentations on sex work accepted force their staff to withdraw those presentations?"
- "And above all, why have the main response to this been silence?"
- "Here is an opportunity to put on record that this conference opposes US government policies on sex work."

The audience met this statement with cheers.