

Abuses against sex workers and erosions of HIV prevention efforts resulting from anti-trafficking initiatives

The following is direct testimony from a Pondicherry-based NGO, Society for Development, Research & Training (SFDRT) describing exactly how anti-trafficking programmes are rolling out IN PRACTICE. Whatever the theory of anti-trafficking, UNAIDS, ILO, UNDP, USAID and others must see that in practice anti-trafficking initiatives are a direct threat to sexual health programmes and to the human rights of sex workers and migrants. – November, 2002.

It is indeed an additional burden to work with HIV/AIDS preventive program with that of trafficking issues but at the same time it is quite evident that those of whom are working on STD/HIV/AIDS are the best to work on anti-trafficking issues too. With an example sited below where in the staff of SFDRT with four other NGOs were invited by the top officials of the police dept. in Pondicherry for a topic on anti-trafficking and NGOs support.

Issues discussed were:

- SFDRT should support the police by passing on the information about the secrets in the brothel.
- The police should be supplied with the information of the cell numbers of the pimps, brothel owners and others in the sex trade.
- SFDRT at the time of rendering counselling, it should collect the information with regard to the areas of availability of sex workers, and also trade secrets which should be passed on to the police.
- Police requires the presence of one representative from SFDRT, a social worker at the time of raids conducted by the police.
- A suggestion was put up by the NGOs that immediately after the raid the parties arrested should be taken for medical examination as a proof of their actual indulgence in sex. This will also reveal whether or not the arrested people were harassed/beaten by the police.
- Police solicited the full support from SFDRT to help the police dept. to completely eradicate the sex trade in the Kan doctor Thottam.- brothel
- Requirement to o inform the nearest police station immediately on the new arrivals of minor girls, strangers, women etc. in the brothel.
- SFDRT should not only work in the field of HIV/AIDS but also assist the police dept. in anti-trafficking.
- Police dept. intends to form an **ADVISORY BODY** for anti-trafficking in which they anticipate/requested SFDRT to participate as a member.
- One NGO suggested that arrests should be made only at the time of indulging in sex and even then only sex workers are arrested now. But the police should also arrest the client and should not leave him to escape. This was agreed by the police. However, police narrated some ratio of the cases arrested during the last few years from which it was clear that majority of arrested were only women.
- In nutshell, SFDRT is required to act as an **INFORMER TO POLICE**.

It is high time for action on the bifurcation of prostitution and anti trafficking issues to avoid future violence against sex workers. It would be wiser if NACO can also coordinate

with the dept. of women and children who are intensively into anti-trafficking issues to be clear with both diversified objectives. According to our experiences it is fine as a first step to stop minors and others who are not willing to be involved in prostitution and that can happen only with sensitization and intimate work with the brothel owners and brokers and nothing can happen by **FORCE**. Yet another helpful program would be to help easy access to sex workers who are unwilling to contact the working NGOs to render them temporary care and support. The above clearly indicates a strong rescue and rehabilitation work within a developed policy, monitored and evaluated. We also need to specify importance of the various activities for instance which of these would we render importance punishing the traffickers or helping the victims in crisis? We welcome further discussions and points of importance.

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