



Mr Salil Shetty
Secretary General
Amnesty International
1 Easton Street
London, WC1X 0DW
United Kingdom

7th of August, 2015

Dear Mr Shetty,

We are writing on behalf of the Swedish sex worker organization Rose Alliance to express our support for Amnesty International's Resolution and draft policy calling for the decriminalization of sex work. We are a member of the regional network ICRSE (the International Committee on the rights of Sex Workers in Europe) and NSWP (the Global Network of Sex Work Projects). We represent a very diverse community which is also reflected in our board and membership. However despite our different backgrounds and experiences we are all convinced that decriminalization of sex work is the best way to ensure and protect our human rights.

We are very pleased that Amnesty International took the time to do its own consultation including looking at the situation in Norway, a country that has adopted the so called "Swedish Model", a legal model that we have been working under for the last 15 years. Not only does it criminalize our clients but anyone who can be seen as facilitating or promoting sex work. This leaves us no choice than to work alone, having no one but ourselves to rely on when it comes to health and safety. In the two largest cities in Sweden, Stockholm and Gothenburg, the state's service providers does not even distribute condoms while doing outreach in the street area. Giving condoms is seen as encouraging 'prostitution' and the idea of occupational safety is dismissed as "they will get raped anyway". It might sound harsh but we feel it is important that you are fully informed of the real experience of sex workers in Sweden.

We are a young organization that was founded in 2009. Sex workers in Sweden have tried to organize several times over the last 40 years, but it is challenging speaking out about our rights as sex workers in a country who only recognizes the right to not sell sex. Since the beginning of our movement's history, in the mid-70s, we have seen the narrative on sex work go from bad to worse. First we were described as social outcasts with a history of abuse, then emotionally damaged who were unfit to be parents, passive bystanders who had bad things happening to them. Today sex workers in Sweden are seen as passive victims with no agency, dignity or self-respect. We can't consent to the work we do. It is actually not seen as work at all, or even an economic activity, but as a form of self-harm that is beyond our control. When you talk about a group of people using such stigmatizing terminology for a long time, while at the same time disqualifying all other narratives as being non-representative and therefore unimportant, something in society changes. We are not valued the same as other citizens, our opinions are unimportant as we are described as lacking insight and suffering from a false consciousness. So in reality we are all seen as mentally ill or damaged. They just want us gone, one way or the other. That is at least how it feels.



To us it is very worrying that the “Swedish Model” is described as an alternative that would protect sex worker’s human rights, when it does quite the opposite. In reality it has resulted in an increased stigma that has dehumanized us and for a long time left us feeling powerless. We have witnessed our colleagues being evicted as a result of the law on procurement, sex worker losing custody of their children just because of their occupation. Sex workers are seen as incapable of making healthy decisions for themselves so obviously we can’t care for a child. One of our board members was murdered as a result of the state taking custody of her children placing them with her violent ex-partner who later killed her. In Sweden a person with a history of violence is seen as a better parent than a sex worker. The only protection we have against prejudice from authorities is to isolate ourselves and keep sex work a secret, and we have learned through firsthand experiences that loneliness can kill.

Today we are fortunate to finally have managed to establish our own organization but we are acutely aware of the negative consequences that the “Swedish Model” brings. Even though we are likely to be stuck with this law for at least another generation of politicians, we are doing what we can to prevent it from happening somewhere else.

This last week has given us hope. It has been truly amazing seeing so much support for decriminalization of sex work. Maybe this very public support of sex workers human rights will bring courage to civil society groups in Sweden as well. We have to believe change is possible.

Amnesty International has a proud history of upholding the rights of marginalized groups and we trust you will make a decision based on evidence, sex workers lived experiences and a respect for our human rights. We might not feel valued in our own country, but it would be invaluable to have Amnesty International stand firmly by our side reminding the world that our experiences are valid and what we have to say is important. Then maybe others will start listening too.

On behalf of Rose Alliance,

Carina Hex

Carina Hex
Vice-chair

Pye Jakobsson
National coordinator