



Only Rights Can Stop the Wrongs

GLOBAL STATEMENT

INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST SEX WORKERS

Today marks the 12th annual International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. For twelve years, sex workers have used this day to highlight the need for action to end violence against sex workers.

The issues faced by sex workers vary from region to region. These differences are due to different laws, social and cultural contexts, but one common issue faced by all sex workers is their vulnerability to and experience of violence.

This global statement draws attention to the fact that all sex workers are vulnerable to violence because of the legal oppression of sex work, stigma, and discrimination. This vulnerability to violence is worse for sex workers living with HIV, sex workers who use drugs, transgender sex workers, migrant sex workers, and sex workers that are part of other marginalised groups.

Sex workers are not accepted by society, which makes them vulnerable to various threats of violence. Female, male and transgender sex workers are exposed to different types of violence everyday and their human rights are violated. Police and law enforcement officials¹², detention centres³, health

¹ “Authorities in Tajikistan Have Toughened Penalties for Sex Work,” NSWP, 16 November, 2015 accessed 8 December 2015 at <http://www.nswp.org/news/authorities-tajikistan-have-toughened-penalties-sex-work>.

² “Forum in the Dominican Republic Addresses Police Abuses of Sex Workers,” NSWP, 26 March, 2015 accessed 8 December, 2015 at <http://www.nswp.org/news/forum-the-dominican-republic-addresses-police-abuses-sex-workers>.

³ Ruth Jacobs, “How Prison Killed Sex Worker Marcia Powell,” *Ms. Blog Magazine*, 9 September, 2014, <http://msmagazine.com/blog/2014/09/09/how-prison-killed-sex-worker-marcia-powell/>.





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care professionals⁴, and programme implementers⁵ violate their human rights every day. Sex workers also experience violence from members of their communities and their families.⁶

The police rarely take violence against sex workers seriously. The legal oppression of sex work makes it very difficult for sex workers to report abuse to the police when it occurs, and to have that abuse taken seriously when they do.⁷ "Police violence is a major issue for sex workers in the Asia Pacific region, who face arbitrary arrest, condoms as evidence, assault and sexual violence. Relations with police are dramatically different where sex work is decriminalised. At the national, regional and global level states need to step up action to stop violence against sex workers," stated Kay Thi Win from the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers.

It is not only the police who do not take violence against sex workers seriously. Politicians, legislators, authorities, academics, and programme implementers also disregard the needs of sex workers. The recent International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) 2015 in Harare, Zimbabwe on key populations is a recent example of this. Daughtie Ogutu from the African Sex Worker Alliance stated: "at ICASA, it was evident that sex workers are discriminated against even in spaces where it is of paramount interest to include us. If we are to achieve the 2030 goal of ending AIDS, sex workers must be involved. What happened in Zimbabwe is a form of institutionalised violence towards sex workers and therefore this day (Dec 17) is a platform we cannot afford to pass by without addressing the violence against sex workers. We call for an end to violence against sex workers".

⁴ UNDP, 2015, The Right(s) Evidence: Sex Work, Violence and HIV in Asia available at <http://www.nswp.org/news/violence-health-care-and-custodial-settings-major-contributor-sex-workers-vulnerability-hiv> (last accessed 8 December, 2015).

⁵ World Health Organisation, 2013, Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers: Practical Approaches from Collaborative Interventions available at <http://www.nswp.org/resource/who-implementing-comprehensive-hivsti-programmes-sex-workers-practical-approaches-collabora> (last accessed 12 December, 2015).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Transgender Sex Worker Nilay Murdered in Istanbul," NSWP, 27 November, 2015 accessed 8 December, 2015 at <http://www.nswp.org/news/transgender-sex-worker-nilay-murdered-istanbul>.



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Sex workers are vulnerable to both physical and psychological violence. Violence increases the risk of HIV transmission and severely decreases self-esteem. When sex workers experience violence, it is more difficult for sex workers to feel empowered to fight for their rights.

Sex workers also experience economic violence. According to Karina Bravo from La Plataforma Latinoamericana de Personas que Ejercen el Trabajo Sexual (PLAPERTS) “violence perpetrated against sex workers is common when individuals appropriate the earnings and property of some sex workers who are empowered to fight for their rights.”

"For this December 17, the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) published a report on our website on 10 years of sex workers' rights in Europe. The report analyses the different trends affecting sex workers in our region such as the criminalisation of sex work and the conflation of migration, sex work and 'trafficking' which makes sex workers more vulnerable to violence," said Luca Stevenson, Coordinator of ICRSE.

In addition to this 10 year report, Sex Workers' Advocacy Network for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SWAN) published [Failures of Justice: State and Non-State Violence Against Sex Workers and the Search for Safety and Redress](#) to highlight the violence faced by sex workers in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. SWAN interviewed 320 female, male, and transgender sex workers in 16 different countries for this report. The numbers speak for themselves. Police had arrested forty percent of respondents in the survey in the last 12 months, one in five experienced physical violence and one in seven experience sexual violence by the police.

"The violence, stigma and discrimination that sex workers in the Caribbean continue to encounter on a daily basis is alarming. As we work together, let us not forget that sex workers are human beings, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers to name a few. Our lives matter too," said Miriam Edwards from the Caribbean Sex Work Coalition. "We must strengthen the activism of organisations of sex workers, through partnerships with women's organisations, communities of sexuality diversity and state institutions," added Karina Bravo from PLAPERTS.



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NSWP demands the following actions be taken to ensure the rights of sex workers are respected:

- An end to the criminalisation and legal oppression of sex workers, clients, and third parties⁸.
- Equal access to rights-based health and social services for sex workers, including sexual and reproductive health.
- Sensitisation training for police authorities, and the criminal justice system on issues related to sex work.
- An end to condoms being used as evidence of sex work.
- And finally, access to rights-based programming for the testing and treatment of HIV and other STIs.

For more information about the demands of sex worker, please read the NSWP [Consensus Statement](#).

For a global list of December 17 events, please click [here](#).

This is a joint statement from the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA), Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), Sex Workers' Advocacy Network for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SWAN), International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE), and La Plataforma Latinoamericana de Personas que Ejercen el Trabajo Sexual (PLAPERTS). Where no regional network exists, the statement has received the support of sub-regional and national networks.



⁸ The term 'third parties' includes managers, brothel keepers, receptionists, maids, drivers, landlords, hotels who rent rooms to sex workers and anyone else who is seen as facilitating sex work.