

International Sex Worker Rights Day

3rd March 2013



ISWR Day in 2012 Sangli, India - Sexual rights are human rights

This day's history goes back to 2001, when over 25,000 sex workers gathered in India for a festival despite efforts from prohibitionist groups who tried to prevent it taking place by pressuring the government to revoke their permit.

That event was organised by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, a Calcutta based group that has over 50,000 sex worker members, and members of their

communities. Sex worker groups across the world have subsequently celebrated 3rd March as an annual, international event, as International Sex Worker Rights Day.

Again this year many sex workers across the world took part in demonstrations and events to mark ISWR Day. These included a gathering sponsored by the **Red Umbrella Fund** and organised by the Movement of Vulnerability and Empowerment in Sierra Leone. Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (**SWEAT**) and **Sisonke** organised a march in Johannesburg

to protest against police brutality and unlawful arrests and calling for the decriminalisation of sex work. They also organised demonstrations in four other cities to mark International Women's Day (8th March).

'The majority of sex workers are women. And it's time that their abuse was recognised as a form of gender-based violence', said SWEAT's Advocacy Officer, Ntokozo Yingwana. Read more coverage of just a few of this year's protests in **Johannesburg**, other cities in **South Africa** and **Sierra Leone**.

International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers

Marking 17th December in Kenya

Sex workers from KESWA and ASWA in Nairobi staged a protest marking International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers on 17th December.

Thousands of sex workers joined with gay activists and organisations to condemn the 'Kill the Gay, Uganda Bill' and marched on City Hall.

There have been a number of sex workers murdered in Nairobi in recent months, with many more receiving inhumane treatment at the hands of law enforcement agencies. The protesters remembered the murders of four sex workers two weeks previously in the Thika area and condemned the lack of action taken by the authorities.

A taskforce report earlier in the year highlighted harassment of sex workers by the authorities and high levels of corruption, with officers soliciting bribes and sexual favours in exchange for releasing arrested sex workers.

Read the full report [here](#).

News headlines

President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Guidance 2012

US Government's revised blueprint for 'Creating an AIDS-free Generation' was released at the end of 2012.

These include a commitment to scaling up combination prevention and treatment services, and a renewed focus on evidence-based interventions and a shift to focusing on "Populations at Greatest Risk", including sex workers.

Although the new blueprint on PEPFAR may pride itself on the work it has already done in the global fight against HIV and AIDS, NSWP fail to see how rhetorical commitments will change PEPFAR's engagement with sex workers. NSWP will not stay silent about the anti-prostitution pledge or its impact upon sex workers globally and we will continue to challenge USAID until it is revoked.

You can read the full NSWP response to the new guidance [here](#).

Anti-Prostitution Loyalty Oath goes to Supreme Court

In April 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments in the case named *USAID v Alliance for Open Society International (AOSI)*.

The case relates to the provision/policy requirement in all USAID funding contracts that require recipients to explicitly oppose prostitution and forces recipients to adopt the government's viewpoint, even when using private funds. These organisations are also prohibited from saying or doing anything that the government deems to be "inconsistent" with the policy.



The Alliance for Open Society International are fighting the against the anti-prostitution pledge on the grounds that this requirement is not in line with the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. The First Amendment states that congress is unable to pass laws that prohibit the freedom of speech. In July 2011, the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit ruled that the requirement does violate free speech principles. The government has now appealed this ruling to the US Supreme Court and a decision is expected in June 2013.

NSWP believes that sex workers are best placed to reverse the pattern of HIV infection rates by providing expert input into international programmes and often carrying out their own community-based prevention, treatment and care programmes. To exclude sex workers from this process would be detrimental to the fostered relationships between sex workers and international agencies working jointly to end HIV/AIDS. To enforce this anti-prostitution agenda through US government-funded programmes only serves to perpetuate the alienation of sex workers from health services.

You can follow how the case develops on this website. www.pledgechallenge.org.

India: Adult consensual sex work not in new Bill - Activists Welcome Move



In February we reported that the National Network of Sex Workers in India appealed to the President of India to reject the 'Ordinance on the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill 2012' which conflated trafficking with sex work and essentially defined all 'prostitution' as exploitation.

Sex workers and Women's rights activists across India have welcomed the Government's move to drop the word 'prostitution' as exploitation from the amended Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code. The new formulation targets sexual exploitation and not adult consensual sex work.

'This formulation clarifies the Indian Government's position of removing adults voluntarily involved in sex work from the ambit of criminalisation', said Meena Seshu from the National Network of Sex workers.

[Read the full press statement.](#)

Kyrgyzstan's sex workers and allies stop draft Bill punishing sex work



In October 2012 the Ministry of the Interior of Kyrgyzstan initiated a new draft bill to introduce an administrative offence for sex work.

Tais Plus with numerous allies campaigned vigorously against this and in February the Parliament Deputy announced that the Kyrgyz Government have withdrawn their Draft Bill.

You can **[read the Tais Plus press statement here.](#)**

STRASS campaigns against criminalisation



STRASS, the French Union of Sex Workers, continue to campaign against attempts to disrupt the proposed bill which would repeal of the offence of soliciting.

'Abolition 2012' are attempting to delay the bill or cause it to fail, and are lobbying for legislation to criminalise the purchase of sex.

You can **[read the press statement 'Masks are Falling' from STRASS here.](#)**

STOP PRESS: French Senate has passed the articles for the decriminalisation of soliciting. It still needs to pass the National Assembly. The amendment for the criminalisation of clients has been rejected.

European Women's Lobby

In December last year, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) lobbied the European Parliament to push their abolitionist agenda: "Together for a Europe free from prostitution."

They were also lobbying hard globally, including at the Commission on the Status of Women meeting (see below.) You can **[read their press release here.](#)**

In response, **NSWP condemned EWL's statement** on the basis that the evidence used to support the call is biased and ill-informed; there is a dangerous conflation between sex work and trafficking; and most notably, sex workers' voices and experiences are rendered invisible in their campaign.

57th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women - 4 to 15 March 2013

An outcome document has now been released following the 57th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

After months of behind the scenes lobbying and two weeks of negotiations, the document holds positive developments including strong agreements to promote gender equality, women's empowerment and to ensure women's reproductive rights and access to sexual and reproductive health services.

NSWP welcomes many of the agreed outcomes in the document that affirm the rights of women and girls. These affirmed rights can be used in our advocacy for the rights of sex workers. There is also a welcomed absence of a conflation between sex work and sexual exploitation, which has been the current focus of recent meetings on the status of women and girls, with no explicit language that recommends an 'End Demand' approach to the regulation of sex work. However NSWP were extremely disheartened to see that protection for sex workers was dropped from the discussion that recommends ensuring services focused on marginalised groups. There is an abundance of evidence of the maltreatment often experienced by sex workers accessing services. Further exacerbated by criminalisation, this renders sex workers as an extremely marginalised population and we regret that this has been ignored in this CSW document.

NSWP would like to thank the group of activists who attended the CSW meetings to challenge the abolitionists and ensure the voices of sex workers were heard at the meetings.

You can read more coverage from the UK Guardian newspaper [here](#) and [here](#).

Amsterdam to raise legal age for sex work to 21

Media reports in February covered the apparent retrograde move in Amsterdam to place a higher age restriction of 21 on sex workers in the Dutch capital.

Mayor Eberhard van der Laan said the moves came from a decision to 'crack down on crime' and 'protect sex workers — mostly women — from abuse.' Read more of the coverage in the [Global Post](#).

Publications

CEDAW shadow reports

In what is becoming an increasingly innovative mechanism for challenging country reports on the CEDAW treaty, two organisations have recently submitted CEDAW shadow reports.

You can read the most recent shadow reports from the [Sex-Worker Forum of Vienna](#) and [SZEEXE](#) which appear on our website.

We think that member organisations may find these reports useful as guidance if they wish to submit their own shadow country reports in the future.

For example, the next (55th) session of CEDAW will take place from 8th-26th July 2013 and will be looking as reports from the following countries:

- Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Serbia and United Kingdom

You can keep up to date on the reporting schedule and find guidance on how to report, etc. on the [CEDAW website here](#).

NSWP has begun collating any CEDAW shadow reports that other sex work organisations are happy to

share, [on our website under this tag](#). If your organisation has submitted report and you are happy to have it featured on our website please contact us.

Sex Work Law Reform in Canada: Considering problems with the Nordic Model



This briefing from the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network considers the impact of the "Swedish" or "Nordic" model on sex workers.

Examining its harmful effects, this paper argues that this approach would not withstand constitutional scrutiny in Canada.

UN Rapporteur report on torture

A key report by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Juan E Méndez, characterises health care abuses against sex workers as cruel and degrading.

The report released in Geneva in March calls for an international debate on abuses in health care settings that may cross the threshold of maltreatment equivalent to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The report specifically highlighted compulsory detention in of marginalised groups including sex workers.

You can [read the full report here](#).

US TIP report – from a sex worker rights perspective

BPPP, Desiree Alliance & SWOP-NYC / SWANK have made a written submission for inclusion in the annual US Trafficking In Persons Report.

The TIP report is intended to illustrate how the United States and foreign governments comply with the “minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons” that are prescribed by the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000*.

Their comprehensive written submission highlights how anti-trafficking policies have resulted in violence and discrimination against sex workers, the negative impact of 'end demand' approaches and how restrictions on funding (such as the 'Anti-Prostitution Loyalty Oath') hinder anti-trafficking initiatives by excluding sex worker rights projects.

You can read their full (11 page PDF) submission [here](#).

Research for Sex Work 13

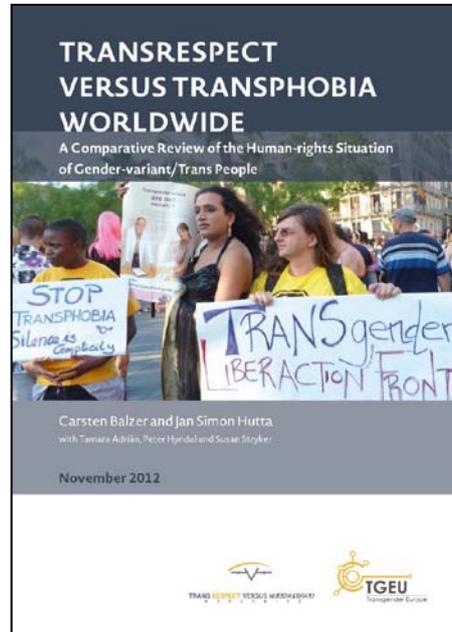
The latest issue of Research for Sex Work "HIV and Sex Work – The view from 2012" was released in December and can now be downloaded as individual articles.



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Transrespect versus Transphobia Worldwide:

A Comparative Review of the Human-rights Situation of Gender-variant/Trans People



This comprehensive global research report has been published by Transgender Europe (TGEU).

The research presents and contextualises the key findings of the Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM), a systematic collection and analysis of reported killings of gender-variant/trans people worldwide.

The report also examines Legal and Health Care Mapping, which provides an overview of existing laws, law proposals, and actual legal and health-care practices relevant to gender-variant/trans people.

The report's findings are striking, in that as of September 2012, 831 reported killings have been documented in 55 countries between January 2008 and December 2011. For over a third of all victims, reports provided information regarding profession, occupation or source of income. Of all victims for whom such information was provided, sex workers formed by far the largest group (75 per cent.)

You can [read the full 124 page report here](#).



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The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) advocates for the health and human rights of sex workers. We work to uphold the voices of sex workers globally and to connect regional networks advocating for the rights of female, male and transgender sex workers.

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