

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sex Workers call on Government to Follow the evidence and decriminalise sex work

*“The decriminalisation of sex work could avert HIV infections by 33- 46% in the next decade, according to a new study published in *The Lancet*, the world’s leading medical journal.”*

July 29, 2014 (Cape Town) –The Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) and Sisonke National Sex Worker Movement of South Africa welcome the imperative finding of the research series on HIV and Sex workers.

The Journal’s special edition on sex work was launched at the 2014 AIDS Conference held in Melbourne, Australia. The research highlighted that, “the women, men, and transgender people who sell sex globally have disproportionate risks and burdens of HIV in countries of low, middle, and high income, and in concentrated and generalised epidemic contexts.”

Decriminalisation of sex work was found to have the greatest potential effect on HIV infections. Addressing violence alone was not enough “in one week in Cape Town alone, we have been dealing with the murder of 2 sex workers – it is not enough to investigate these murders - we must redirect policing resources from persecuting sex workers to protecting sex workers” said Sally-Jean Shackleton, Director SWEAT.

Kholi Buthelezi, National Coordinator of the Sisonke Sex Workers Movement, who co-authored another study published in the same Journal titled **‘Human Rights Violations Against Sex Workers: burden and effect on HIV’**, added: “until sex work is decriminalized, our efforts to deliver health care will be undermined by the continued stigma and marginalization sex workers deal with on a daily basis.”

Buthelezi and her co-authors reviewed evidence from more than 800 studies and reports on the burden and HIV implications of human rights violations against sex workers. They found that human rights violations directly and indirectly increased sex workers susceptibility to HIV and undermined efforts to prevent and address HIV.

Two young women lost their lives in Cape Town in the space of a week this July “how many more have to die before our government follows the evidence and embarks on law reform now a decade old?” asked Cherith Sanger, the Advocacy Manger at SWEAT. The South African Law Reform Commission began a law reform process in 2001, but has failed to produce a report resulting from the 2009 Discussion paper on adult prostitution.

Sweat and Sisonke have repeatedly asked the South African government to progress law reform on sex work.

More information:

Sally Shackleton: 021 448-7875 or 082 330 4113

Links: the Lancet series on HIV and Sex Work <http://www.thelancet.com/series/HIV-and-sex-workers>

Facts about sex work: <http://www.thelancet.com/series/HIV-and-sex-workers/infographic>