

The anti-sex work anti-trafficking agenda: a threat to sex workers' health and human rights

Statement from the Network of Sex Work Projects (Booth 98) at the XIV International Conference on AIDS, Barcelona, July 2002

While a number of anti-trafficking organisations recognise sex work as a legitimate profession, those organisations that seek to repress sex work and sex workers are gaining the upper hand. These include internationally active, highly funded organisations such as the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW). CATW recently published a 'hit list' of organisations receiving US funding, accusing them of 'promoting prostitution'. This hit list includes well-known and well-respected organisations providing essential HIV care and prevention services to sex workers in a number of countries.

This is not an isolated incident. Elements of the anti-trafficking movement are using the anti-trafficking agenda to push for repressive policies such as the criminalisation of sex work and the restriction of women's ability to migrate. **Far from being a solution to the pressing problems faced by migrant sex workers, repressive policies increase vulnerability to infection and violence.** Those anti-trafficking campaigns which implicitly or explicitly support repressive measures threaten sex workers' health and human rights in the following ways:

- Projects that use a non-judgemental, non-stigmatising approach to sex worker HIV prevention are threatened with public denouncement and loss of funding. This is especially the case for projects working with youth.
- They resurrect old notions of sex workers as victims through calls for sex work to be treated as 'violence against women'. Community empowerment is now widely recognised as essential for HIV prevention among sex workers. 'Victimisation' works against empowerment.
- They lead to repressive measures against sex workers and migrant sex workers. In a number of countries, 'anti-trafficking' activities have included brothel raids, summary deportation and laws restricting women's freedom of movement.
- They divert attention from the issues that are of concern to the majority of the world's sex workers by sensationalising stories of lost innocence. These issues include the recognition of sex work as labour, the right to migration, the right to live free from police and state violence, to form our own organisations, and access to health care services, including HIV prevention and care.

The Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) calls upon all those organisations involved in HIV prevention and care, in particular UNAIDS and WHO, to reject the repressive anti-trafficking agenda and to affirm their solidarity with those organisations under threat. We demand continued support of organisations working to promote the health and human rights of all sex workers.

**Demonstration: July 11, 11:00
at main conference entrance**