



SWAN-Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rights groups: hate crimes against sex workers must stop

December 17, Budapest– December 17th is International Day to End Violence against Sex Workers. This event was created to call attention to hate crimes committed against sex workers all over the globe.

On this occasion rights groups in 15 countries, members of SWAN – Sex Workers Rights Advocacy Network in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, have organized a campaign to point to the miserable state of human rights of sex workers, frequent violence against them and increased risk to HIV/AIDS that they face as a result.

“In support of all those who have experienced violence we the undersigned demand that violence against sex workers must be recognised and sanctioned as a crime” – reads the petition initiated during the campaign.

It further stipulates that sex workers, like anyone else, should be equally protected by the law.

In reality, it is often not the case: “Where sex workers face stigma, unequal access to protection of the law and unsafe work areas, they are frequently subject to physical and sexual violence: they are beaten, raped, and blackmailed by customers and pimps alike. Police does not help, but often joins in blackmailing or requesting sexual services. Police uses condoms found on sex workers as evidence against them, in this way discouraging their use and helping spread of HIV/AIDS” – says Aliya Rakhmetova, the SWAN Project Coordinator in the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union.

Sex workers are increasingly banned from the inner city centres and forced to deserted and dark outlying areas, where they are even more vulnerable to violence by pimps and customers.

Unfortunately, lots of this hate-related crime remains unnoticed and unpunished. That is why SWAN members have undertaken a community-based research project on human rights abuses facing sex workers in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

“A total of 238 sex workers were interviewed in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine” – adds Aliya Rakhmetova.

“Final results will be released in each of the participating countries on March 3, 2008.”

Collection of signatures on a petition calling governments to protect human rights of sex workers started on December 1, International AIDS Day.

On December 10, Human Rights Day, the rights groups started distributed The Declaration of the Rights of Sex Workers on the streets and squares in their capitals.

On December 17 the groups will hand the Petition to the respective governments, give media interviews, organize e-card emailing campaign and in some countries have street performances with red umbrellas.

Research shows sex workers are more vulnerable to HIV than the rest of population. In many countries prostitution is illegal. Sex workers have no access to education about HIV infection and effective prevention. They have no access to HIV testing, free condoms, medical treatment or counselling. HIV infection is often a result of violence: sex workers are forced to sex without condoms. In such circumstances police is more often additional burden than help.

Signatures on the petition were collected in Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, and internationally on <http://www.PetitionOnline.com/swan15/petition.html>.

Originally started by the Sex Workers Outreach Project USA as a memorial and vigil for the victims of the Green River Killer in Seattle Washington, International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers has empowered workers from cities around the world to come together and organize against discrimination and remember victims of violence.

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NOTES FOR THE EDITOR:

For more information please contact:

Aliya Rakhmetova, SWAN Coordinator,
Hungarian Civil Liberties Union,

Tel. +36 70 211 7377; Email: sexwork@tasz.hu, Web: www.swannet.org

Short history of International Day against Violence against Sex Workers (audio file):
<http://emedia.art.sunysb.edu/swirl/Dec17PSA.mp3>

Campaign in the US: <http://www.swopusa.org/drupal/node/95>

SWAN is a project of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, HCLU, www.tasz.hu

SWAN Members:

Aksion Plus, Albania, www.aksionplus.net

HESED, Bulgaria, www.hesed.bg

Bliss Without Risk, Czech Republic, http://www.rozkosbezrizika.cz/01_hm/100_ENGLISH.htm

MPEE, Hungary, www.prostitualtak.hu

Kovcheg, Kazakhstan, fsz@mail.ru

Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan, gkurmanova@yandex.ru

Dia+Logos, Latvia, dialogs@diacentrs.lv

I Can Live, Lithuania, www.galiugyventi.lt

HOPS, Macedonia, www.hops.org.mk

Tada, Poland, www.tada.pl

ARAS-Romanian Association Against AIDS, Romania, www.arasnet.ro

Humanitarian Action, Russia, www.humanitarianaction.org

Siberian Initiative, Russia, <http://www.sibin.ru>

Jazas. Serbia, www.jazas.net

Odyseus, Slovakia, www.ozodyseus.sk

All Ukrainian Association on Harm Reduction, Ukraine, www.uhra.org.ua