



# Sex Workers Rights Advocacy Network in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

SWAN NEWS, Issue 27, 2010

## IN FOCUS

### Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Excluded from Proposed Macedonian Antidiscrimination Draft Bill

In January 2010 the government of Macedonia proposed a new draft of the long-awaited anti-discrimination law. Though previous drafts included "sexual direction" as ground protected against discrimination, it has been eliminated from the present draft. Boris O. Ditrlich, the advocacy director in the program for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of Human Rights Watch wrote a letter to the Prime Minister of Macedonia.

International law and standards prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people against discrimination is therefore part of Macedonia's duty-bound obligations. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Macedonia acceded in 1994, affirms the equality of all people in articles 2 and 26.

Likewise, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the international body of experts that monitors compliance with the Conven-



tion on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to which Macedonia acceded in 1993 has also affirmed in its General Comments that the Convention's prohibitions on discrimination (art.2) are taken to include "sexual orientation." Human Rights Watch disagrees with the approach. Express mention of the grounds of discrimination is an essential measure toward eliminating unequal treatment. HRW thus urges the Prime Minister to change the draft law and make the anti-discrimination framework law compatible with international human rights standards.

For the full text, go to: <http://www.hrw.org/node/88224>

SWAN newsletter is the voice of the Sex Workers Rights Advocacy Network, a network of civil society organizations engaged in advocating the Human Rights of the sex workers in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Currently SWAN consists of 17 member-countries of the region.

If you wish to learn more about SWAN activities, please visit [WWW.SWANNET.ORG](http://WWW.SWANNET.ORG).

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### South Africa: Push to Protect Sex Workers During World Cup

A steering committee has been set up with a mandate to push for reforms with the police commissioner and legislature before the world soccer showcase in June 2010. Sex workers and activist organizations say the World Cup is an opportunity

to decriminalize their trade.

"I have seen my colleagues harassed by the police and I have also experienced that," said Anna Sibisi, a sex worker for the past eight years in Cape Town. "I would like to see this end before the World Cup."

## IN FOCUS (continued):

Well aware of the resistance to changing the law, sex workers are pushing for at least a moratorium on arrests during the soccer event. "We should be given temporary licenses to operate during the World Cup as they map the long term plans," Sibisi said.

In South Africa, sex workers face a jail term if charged for at least three times. "The police have to stop harassing sex workers, doing so will increase their vulnerability, that is why we will engage with police authorities before the World Cup," said Dianne Massawe of the Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT).

SWEAT is a non governmental organization that advocates for the rights of sex workers. The Cape Town based organization has also been on the forefront of calling for the decriminalization of sex in South Africa. "We have realized that people still enter into sex work, therefore we say it is better to educate (them) and have their rights protected - it's a matter of human rights," added Massawe.

South Africa's HIV and AIDS and STI Strategic Plan (2007-2011) recommended that sex work be decriminalized. For Health researcher Marlise Richter with the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), the merits of such a move are many; chief among them reproductive health for sex workers. She said: "If it is legal the sex worker will dictate the terms knowing that the law is on her side, she or he can negotiate with a client for safe sex which is rarely happening now."

Health activist Tim Bannet says HIV transmission will be significantly reduced if sex work is de-

criminalized. South Africa expects at least 450,000 visitors during the World Cup, and according to Bannet-sexual activity will increase. The prospect is chilling for a country that has the world's highest HIV and AIDS rate. UNAIDS says South Africa accounts for 17 percent of global infections.

Bannet referred to the New Zealand experience after laws were changed in 2003. Studies conducted by the government five years later showed positive changes, which Bannet said were due to 'improved working conditions and sex workers being able to negotiate safer sex and report abuse to police.' But the suggestion of decriminalization has again sparked furious public debate in South Africa, a reflection of how sex work is still highly stigmatized in African countries.

The process of changing the law began some seven years ago when the South African Law Reform Commission was tasked with reviewing the Sexual Offences Act. However, the process has dragged and the initial bill is expected for parliamentary debate in March next year and final legislation in 2011. "The delay has not been encouraging and this has had profound effects on sex work operations in this country," said Massawe. "We anticipate a day when our leaders will realise that this phenomenon will remain part of our society."

"We are talking to FIFA on all these issues of public health and I think it will also be an opportunity to introduce the human rights aspect-that is of sex workers," concluded Zanele Mthembu of SANAC Sports and Entertainment Sector.

AllAfrica.com



## International Sex Workers Day, 3rd March

*The 3rd of March is International Sex Worker Rights Day. The day's history goes back to 2001 when over 25,000 SWs gathered in India for a SW festival. The organizers, 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 3 March as International Sex Workers' Rights Day.*

**Calcutta:** over 500 sex workers gathered from different red light areas to stage a candle light procession on the occasion of the 'International Sex Workers Rights Day'. The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya, a forum of sex workers organized this rally to highlight the socio-economic plight of sex workers. Children of the sex workers presented street plays and other programs. Swapna Gyne, a sex worker said: "we were not allowed to observe this day. We challenged the government that we will be observing the day by any which way. The day was March 3. Hence we celebrate this day and take oath that till the time sex workers exist, we will observe this day," she added.



## IN FOCUS (continued):

**Chicago:** the local Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP) devised a list of demands pointing to the decriminalization of prostitution. SWOP's political objectives are decriminalization of adult prostitution, securing social recognition of sex work as a valid profession and establishing sex workers right to self-determination. The March 3 demands include an end to raids and deportations, and a stop to the trapping and then forced reeducating of SWs and customers. SWOP also called for ending the repression of SWs under the banner of anti-trafficking.

**Sacramento:** SWOP-NORCAL celebrated March 3 with a lobbying day. Issues included criminalization of out communities, the targeting of transgender workers, migrants and sex workers of color, lack of police protection and recourse in cases of abuse, and targeting sex workers in lieu of addressing the real issues of trafficking.

On March 3 a specific and urgent issue was brought forth for which HOP-NORCAL seeks support. Among the numerous hardships which effect the communities, it is surprising that the organizations' insistence on condoms for protection is actually used as evidence in prostitution cases by police and District Attorneys in California. Although sex workers use condoms, it is clear that condom use is inhibited when the mention or use of condoms can be employed against them.



**Halifax:** Stepping Stone, an organization that provides outreach and supportive programs to sex workers in the Halifax Region (Nova Scotia, Canada) issued a statement urging law enforcement and the courts to review the current arrest and release procedures that impede sex workers' health and safety within the region. The Canadian Criminal Code gives police the power to release anyone arrested for solicitation on conditions that prevent them from accessing entire sections of the Halifax region. Sex workers and their allies refer to these conditions as being placed on boundaries. Rene Ross with Stepping Stone says "These conditional releases prevent sex workers from accessing essential services such as transition services, health care and housing." Not only does this keep sex workers from accessing some services, "it further isolates and forces them to work in unsafe areas and under riskier circumstances."

## Paris Manifestation for the Rights of Sex Workers

Partially inspired by March the 3rd, but held 3 weeks later, the conference took place in le Sénat in Paris and it included a full day of panel discussions on topics of sex work and the Internet, the criminalization of clients and the debate around re-establishing a brothel system in France. Participants included female, male and transgender sex worker activists, ally activists, politicians and others from across France and also representatives from Switzerland, Belgium, Sweden and the Netherlands.

The always fabulous traditional Pute Pride street manifestation took place after the conference. Proudly taking over the street, the crowd wended its way through the streets of Paris in beautiful vibrant glory with banners, red umbrellas and chanted slogans.

## Sex Worker Rights Music Video

On December the 3<sup>rd</sup> the San Francisco Sex Worker Film

and Arts Festival premiered the "sex worker anthem", Courtney Trouble's "The Burnout," a music video by Scarlot Harlot and Courtney Trouble. In the video, a 'day in Courtney's life' parallels her journey from phone sex to sexual representation/pornography as well as her political journey, interwoven with sex worker demonstrations, clips and photos from organizations listed here.

To view the clip, click: <http://blip.tv/file/717209>



Nothing about us without us is a message repeated more often than ever before by sex workers around the world. This column in the SWAN News provides an opportunity for sex workers to express their opinions, tell us about their lives, problems and dreams. Contributions are welcome: write to [sexwork@tasz.hu](mailto:sexwork@tasz.hu)

## SEX WORKERS REPORT

# SWAN News interview with Victoriya about the situation of migrant sex workers in Kazakhstan.

### ***What is the situation for girls from Uzbekistan or other countries in Kazakhstan ?***

Recently, the migrant girls have the most problems. Let's say their documents are OK. But the police take them to the police station and say they have to check their documents and then take the documents and lock the girls up. In a recent case in July in Taldykorgan, the police held the girls for six days, while they "checked" their documents. For six days, the girls were raped, beaten. They gave them nothing to eat. They were treated horribly while they were imprisoned. At the very end, they give their documents back and said "Your documents are fine, you can go."



### ***What did the girls do?***

They came to the drop-in center and they lived there for 3 days in the center. The psychologist spoke with them and we had doctors treat them for free. Not just a gynecological check-up, we also had a surgeon come because they were beaten so heavily, not just raped.

### ***Did they report the case to other authorities?***

They didn't go to the court or the police, because there is no point. The case will be closed, it is of no use. They did not want to live through the humiliation again and see no one cared about what happened.

### ***What has happened to these women?***

They went to work in a sauna owned by a police man. Since the owner is a police man, they are relieved, because they are protected from the police now. They are happy now, he is a good owner. The girl gets 70 % and the policeman gets 30%.

### ***Is this an average arrangement?***

Most sex workers split their profits 50-50. There are also some migrant girls without documents, who are totally controlled in slavery-like situations, who work only for food. This is a very small percentage, though. It is now more and more popular for sex workers to work independently.

### ***If most women keep most of their profits, why are there some migrant women working in really horrible conditions ?***

The situation is that women are coming to work in Kazakhstan, because they have no money or education. So they choose this job. Or, the girls come from the villages maybe for another job, but then they see there is no job market, so they do sex work. The problems come for the girls with fake documents.

If they come with fake documents, the pimps are really not nice to them because they control the situation 100 per cent. If a migrant woman works alone, the police come along and she is deported. If

they work with the pimps, the police comes, the pimps pay the police and they let her stay in the country with her fake documents. The independents can also have problems with bad clients, who beat or humiliate them.

So, the girls work with pimps because of this. Many pimps are women, but these pimps, very often treat the women badly. They can force them to work, tell the women they can not reject clients. The girls from Uzbekistan say that to come to Kazakhstan is very profitable for them. In one month they earn what they would in six months in Uzbekistan, so the risk is worth it to them.

### ***How do women get out of bad conditions?***

Here is one example. There are some local girls, who came from the village to the capital to go do sex work. They looked for a pimp to work for, they found pimps, everything was ok, he gave them money. But then one day, they decided to run away and work independently. That was when their problems started, because they didn't manage to run away. The pimps caught them and stabbed them. When they recovered, in punishment, he forced them to work for no money at all.



## SEX WORKERS REPORT (continued)

So the girls went to the police on their own. They managed OK with the police and the police intervened, not to help the girls but because the pimps were dealing drugs. The police took the pimps to jail - but not for what they did to the girls, for the drugs. They do not care about the girls, but the drugs... Well, it was the drugs that saved the girls.

So the girls were free and they went to work for another sauna and they are now doing well, working in conditions that are ok. In saunas, it is safer, because it is your space and there are admin staff who run the place. They offer some security because they don't want the girls to be beaten by bad clients, it is bad for their business too.

Pimps are an issue. But there are other important ones for migrant sex workers, like access to treatment for health issues and trying to obtain legal documents.

***What happens to the girls when they are caught by police working with fake documents?***

There was a raid recently and 7 girls were deported but one girl was allowed to stay. She said "One police man liked me a lot. Now, I have to have sex with him every Saturday, so I can stay in the country."

If they are officially deported, they are kept in the police station for 3 days and then deported. It becomes an official government deportation and so, they are generally not humiliated. When a girl is deported, the government pays for a bus. We don't know what happens on the other side of the border when they get there. In 3 months they can come back again and they do. Many women, manage to come back before the 3 months are up, by paying the police to pass through the border.



## SWAN Member Organizations Use December 17 for Campaign Purposes

### NEWS FROM SWAN NETWORK

*Sex workers' organizations across Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia used the opportunity of the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers to advocate SW's rights. Below is a summary of the activities carried out by the organizations.*

### HOPS and STAR, Macedonia: workshops, screenings

The Program for support of sex workers at HOPS organized a Human Rights week throughout 10-17 December with various daily activities. On 10 December an educational workshop was held where a film was screened on human rights and there was a brief presentation about the importance of the day. On the 14th a workshop "Legislation and SR and the benefits of legalization" was held, and on the 15th the film "You must know about me" was screened and a psycho-social workshop was held on violence and the emotions associated with it.

On the 16th there was a poster workshop about December 17th and human rights, and on the 17th the film "You must know about me" was screened again, and a presentation was held about the importance of the day. After a small party organized by the Sexual Workers red umbrellas were handed out. During the entire event, the Manifesto of the Sex Workers and brochures with a short story for 17 December were distributed.

STAR (sex workers' rights activist group) of Macedonia designed and launched a calendar for 2010, to mark December 17th and sex workers' rights. The calendar may be downloaded from here [http://swannet.org/files/swannet/File/Documents/STAR\\_kalendar\\_small\\_2010.pdf](http://swannet.org/files/swannet/File/Documents/STAR_kalendar_small_2010.pdf) in pdf format, and quality print versions may be requested from the STAR team (write to SWAN coordinator to [swan@tasz.hu](mailto:swan@tasz.hu)).

### KOVCHEG, Kazakhstan: roundtable discussion, media workshop, outreach session

A roundtable discussion with the representatives of local authorities, ngo-s and the media was held. The event allowed an opportunity to raise the topic of discrimination of sex workers and IV drug users, as well as people living with HIV.

The issues covered included the legalization of prostitution in Kazakhstan, together with the authorities' view on it. Also, the pros and cons of the necessity of punitive measures to prevent violence against sex workers were listed, and that penalties should be consistent with the protection of human rights and to prosecute those responsible for non-compliance.

There was also a media workshop with journalists, who revealed problems faced by media professionals when covering the sex industry. The next step was the outreach session, where outreach workers handed out red umbrellas of paper carrying the sign "Fight for your rights!"



## NEWS FROM SWAN NETWORK (continued)

**Siberian Initiative, Russia: awareness campaign**

The organization dispatched the press release and materials prepared by SWAN among the organizations working with sex workers in Russia. In case there was time available, copies of the Macedonian documentary "You should know about me" were played to SWs, followed by a discussion.

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Ukraine 2009

**Juventas, Montenegro: media campaign, workshop**

On December the 17th over 180 organizations in Montenegro, the media and UN agencies were informed about this date and its meaning. There was feedback from only one organization dealing with rights of women. A "mini workshop" was held with sex workers explaining them their rights – like that they can report violence to the police without consequences – which was accepted very well. Also, a questionnaire on violence against sex workers working on the street and in brothels was prepared.



Montenegro 2009

**Legalife, Ukraine: media campaign, flashmob, street activism**

On December the 17th, Legalife held a press conference on countering violence against sex workers. After the press conference the organization BF "Drop in Centre" held a flashmob in the central square, on the main street and near the Kiev mayor's office with red umbrellas, each bearing the sign "Equal rights!" and "No to violence!". The action was attended by 10 SWs from different regions and organizations of Ukraine. After the rally leaflets and photos were distributed to bystanders. For more on how Ukrainian SWs combat discrimination and violence against them, go to:

- <http://swannet.org/ru/node/1714>

**Aksion Plus, Albania: media campaign**

Several articles were published on SW-related issues, including the life of transgender sex workers.

Aksion Plus was invited to make a speech on the Second Debate for Human Rights in Albania sponsored by the Dutch Embassy. Aksion Plus attended one of the panels on Homophobia and Discrimination of Sexual Minorities where they presented the current situation.



Albania 2009

**Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan: art exhibition, informal meeting, role playing**

Several months before December, an exhibition titled "Crafty hands" was announced in the community. All works had been collected by December the 17th. All partner organizations as well as sex workers were invited. In the beginning of the party the video from Macedonia was screened, so that the community knew that the December 17 was not only celebrated in Kyrgyzstan but also in other countries. Rights violation and violence against sex workers is prevalent in many countries. Guests were entertained with poems and a scene from

"Little Red Riding Hood" fairy tale to demonstrate how stigmata and discrimination were applied by society, how sex workers' rights were violated by clients and law enforcement officials, and how sex workers feared to assert their rights.

LGBT community members shared personal experiences, later guests and employees were invited to enact small sex work-related scenes. Some sex workers also told their stories and how they handled difficult situations. In the evening the rally continued in the street.



## Odyseus Slovakia: public campaign, screenings



Slovakia 2009

The organization's 17th December campaign included the distribution of postcards, copies of the declaration of human rights of sex workers, and red umbrellas. The Christmas Meeting of indoor and outdoor sex workers connected with a movie presentation on the human rights of sex workers (Eurosex, video from Brussels conference, HOPS video) and with a nice chat, Christmas cookies e, self-support and having fun.

In the period between 14-22 December several seminars were held to reduce stigmas of SWs in six towns in Bulgaria. The aim of the seminars was to highlight the work of NGOs on the local level, and to place emphasis on the problems faced by sex workers, including the effect of discrimination and stigmatization of SWs on the spread of HIV and other STDs in Bulgaria. Representatives from municipalities, police and foster homes attended the seminars, as well as young people and doctors.

The Sofia seminar on December the 17th focused on the violence which sex workers face every day. The documentary "You must know about me" was screened and all guests were involved in a discussion about what could be done for sex workers in Sofia. A representative from the municipality said that she would like to help HESED in finding a place for a low-threshold center for sex workers. All guests received a red umbrella.

## HESED, Bulgaria: seminars, campaign activism

Bulgaria 2009



## JAZAS, Serbia: media campaign, workshops, roundtable discussions

On December 17th, there was a public announcement on the prominent national TV station B92 about the history and meaning of this date.

AZAS' team held two workshops in which sex workers participated in the creation of the poster and postcard for the December 17th action. On December 17th and 18th, JAZAS held a peer education seminar. 12 sex workers participated in workshops facilitated by peer educator Marianne Jonker from SOAIDS Netherlands. The themes of the workshops ranged from safe sex, police violence to peer education principles and the meaning of December 17th. The JAZAS team conducted outreach activities during which they distributed key chains with messages printed on them (Sex work is work! Stop violence, support our rights!).

On December 18th, JAZAS held a press conference/round table discussion "Prostitution in Serbia: Is there an adequate answer?" The conference was attended by stakeholders, the non-governmental sector and the media. The round table discussion / press conference provided several different viewpoints on sex work and opened discussion on the different terms and concepts related to sex work like trafficking, legalization, decriminalization and other models of sex work regulation. This was the first 'meeting' of this sort in Belgrade, in which different stakeholders were brought together to start a dialogue and shed light on this "taboo" subject.



Lithuania 2009



Serbia 2009

## I Can Live Coalition: informal campaign meeting for SWs and supporters

On December 17, 2009 a SWAN member in Lithuania, the *I Can Live* Coalition organized an afternoon party for sex workers in cooperation with medical counseling and drop-in centre for sex workers "Demetra".

The event took place on Demetra's premises. The women had an opportunity to gather and meet SW's rights supporters in an informal environment, have a cup of tea or coffee, and share their daily worries and problems. They complained about violence they are subjected to by partners, clients and pimps. They expressed their fear to file appeals to police as well as doubts that law enforcement could be on their side.

*I Can Live* Coalition's executive director Jurgita Poskeviciute introduced the women to the concept and origins of the December 17 campaign, presented good practices and foreign experiences in commemorating this day. A quiz on HIV prevention was also organized during the event.

For the third consecutive year, on December the 17th sex workers called for society to respect the human dignity of persons involved in commercial sex, to combat discrimination and violence against one of the most marginalized groups of our society.

"Half a year ago, a sex worker died a violent death in Kirovograd. Recently two male escorts who provided sexual services were killed in Sevastopol, and there are cases of girls disappearing. This year we recorded dozens of human rights abuse cases against sex-workers, occurring in almost half of Ukraine's regions" - says Irina Mishina, the chair of the Ukrainian league Legalife.

According to recent estimates, about 63 to 93 thousand women are involved in commercial sex in Ukraine. Virtually all of them are working illegally, and regularly become the victim of violence, both by customers and law enforcers.

"It is just awful, when your rights are violated by those who are supposed to protect them. Who do we call for assistance then? It seems that sex workers are not regarded as human beings in general. Of course, they are forced to break the law, but that is for administrative reasons, and should not subject them into coercion to have free sex, being beaten or having their money taken. No one is allowed to use violence against anyone else" - said Natalia Isaeva, leader of the sex workers group initiative in Kirovograd.

"Distrust of police and forced rush into agreements with customers reduce the ability of sex workers to eliminate potentially violent clients or those who are under the effect of alcohol or drugs. Moreover, law enforcement officials recently began to consider the presence of condoms as a further proof of prostitution. It makes sex workers discard condoms, leading to an increased risk of contracting various infections, including HIV / AIDS" - stated Helen Zuckerman, head of the public center for sex workers in Kiev.

The marginalized situation of sex workers and the increasing violence against them had a negative effect on the HIV epidemic and other infection levels of other STDs.

## Ukraine is Continuing to Kill Sex Workers



## You Must Know About Me – Macedonian Sex Workers' Campaign Video

"You Must Know About Me" is a first-hand account of sex workers' experiences and aspirations off and on the streets prepared by HOPS, SWAN's member organization in Macedonia. While dealing with the harassment and violence from clients, pimps, and the police, sex workers strive to counter the hostile public attitude by speaking out and fighting for basic rights. The video calls for zero tolerance of violence against sex workers, adequate investigation and prosecution of perpetrators, and coordinated response of social institutions to the actual needs of sex workers.

In a large part of the video, sex workers give detailed account of a police raid where they were all taken in police custody and subjected to inhumane, degrading and humiliating treatment overnight. Next day, it turned out that they were detained for the criminal act of spreading infectious diseases. In groups of five the women were taken to a clinic for AIDS-screening, despite the fact that they are regularly screened for STD-s. The sex workers were exposed to the media with their health status revealed.

The production of the film was made possible by WITNESS, who provided training, consultation and editing assistance. WITNESS ([www.witness.org](http://www.witness.org)) is a human rights organization that uses video to open the eyes of the world to human rights violations. WITNESS empowers people to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools for justice, promoting public engagement and policy change.

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXhyzUya9BE>  
[www.hops.org.mk](http://www.hops.org.mk)  
<http://hub.witness.org/en/node/17245>





## NEWS FROM SWAN NETWORK (continued)

Albanian SWAN-member Aksion Plus have prepared the first national map on the sex work-scene in Albania. The findings are alarming.

Significantly higher rates of HIV and STI infections have been documented among sex workers and their clients as compared to most other population groups within a country. However, the true extent of HIV transmission from sex workers and their clients to other populations remains generally unknown. Many factors significantly contribute to raise sex workers' HIV and STI infection vulnerability, such as: stigmatization and marginalization, limited access to social, health and legal services, sexual exploitation and trafficking, exposure to violence and substance abuse.

Sex workers in Albania live under the daily threat of violence (both verbal and physical), discrimination, constant fear of police actions, and lack of substantive support services. These problems are significant factors underlying the continued presence of this population on the streets. Furthermore, these dangers, in turn are compounded by stigma, isolation and hidden activity associated with their work.

Sex work is an illegal activity in Albania and article 114/a "foresees aggravating circumstances whereby the exploitation of prostitution is sentenced from 7 to 15 years imprisonment". It is obvious that the current law enforcement is problematic because instead of reducing the sex work activity and risks associated with it, it drives sex work and sex workers further underground and detain them from seeking and receiving socio-health support and also keep them detached from the mainstream society. In addition, police rarely responds to the complaints of sex workers, even in cases of harsh violence towards them.

For more information, go to:

<http://www.aksionplus.net/reports.html>

## National Mapping of Commercial Sex Workers in Albania

## Tais Plus and HOPS to Participate at Liverpool Harm Reduction Conference



On 25th-29th April 2010, the 21st International Harm Reduction Conference is taking place where it was first established in Liverpool, England.

Here is an update about sex worker and allies involvement, so far, in the conference. A major

session on sex work has been accepted, this is supported by the International Sex Work Harm Reduction Caucus. The caucus is an informal network bringing together sex worker organizations and representatives and was formed in order to promote the inclusion of sex workers in debates about harm reduction and human rights particularly within this international forum.

The session entitled "The War Against Sex Workers" currently includes presentations from ALCIS in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tais Plus based in Kyrgyzstan, Scarlett Alliance (Australia) reflecting on sex worker peer to peer capacity development in Fiji & He Jin Kim presenting on transgender issues.

In addition a concurrent session supported by UKNSWP entitled "Sex Work & Harm Reduction in the UK: Safety, Skills & the Struggle for Social Inclusion" has been accepted. Beside the sex work-related sessions, a couple of other organizations have been accepted to present in other, non sex work-specific sessions as well, like Pye Jakobsen (Rose Alliance, Sweden) and Marija Tosheva (HOPS, Macedonia).

For more information about the conference go to:

<http://www.ihra.net/Liverpool/Home>

## SEX WORKERS' ADVOCACY SCHOOL

### The Curious Sex Workers' Guide to the "Anti-Prostitution Pledge"

#### 1. What is the "Anti-Prostitution Pledge"?

The 'Anti-Prostitution Pledge' is the name given to an American policy put into place in under George Bush. Since 2003, any groups receiving money for anti-trafficking or HIV programs have to have a policy opposing prostitution. This affects groups all around the world who receive money from the American government and work with sex workers – even if they are receiving US money for something other than their work with sex workers.

In 2003, the US government also created what they called PEPFAR, a 15 billion dollar fund to help fight AIDS internationally. Groups receiving PEPFAR money are among those who must sign the pledge.

#### 2. Were sex workers the only group targeted?

No! We are in good company: others targeted were all women needing to get abortions, drug-users and LGBT people! In 2003, the United States government said that money could not go to groups or clinics who also offer information or services related to abortion or needle-exchange for drug-users. During this time, American funding for research into the risks of men who have sex with men and transgender women also came under attack.

The Bush administration also required that 1/3 of all HIV-prevention money go to promoting sexual 'abstinence' (no sex) and 'being faithful' (only sex with your husband or wife in heterosexual marriage) without ever mentioning condoms (this is sometimes called A+B). In 2006, for example, out of all the money spent on HIV-prevention by related to sex in different countries, 56% went to A+B programs and only 44% went to programs that talked about A+B but also mentioned using condoms (sometimes called ABC) or that just promoted condoms.

## SEX WORKERS' ADVOCACY SCHOOL (Continued)

### 3. Has the anti-prostitution pledge affected sex workers?

Yes ! It has affected sex workers all over the world, and in particular, it has affected sex workers' access to life-saving health information, services and spaces to improve their working and living conditions.

Some big NGOs who didn't want to lose their funding from the US signed the pledge closed down their sex worker projects or drop-ins or stopped supporting sex workers. In Cambodia, a medical clinic by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) was closed down. In Bangladesh, drop-ins for sex workers were closed down. In 2005, the US government cut half the funding for PSI, an international NGO because of outrage by American politicians over their peer outreach project to sex workers in Costa Rica.

In East-Asia, some NGOs and clinics signed the pledge and interpreted it to mean that they could not offer health information to male or trans sex workers who came to their service.

Some groups in Asia and Southern Africa signed the pledge saying they "opposed prostitution" but continued their work with sex workers and kept on receiving United States funding. One of these groups has expressed that they are scared that if they publicly defended sex workers' rights, they could lose all their money.

Some groups refused to sign the pledge. VAMP, a sex workers' group in India refused to and so had to turn back their funding. Most famously, the government of Brazil refused to sign the pledge and lost 40 million dollars from the U.S. Pedro Chequer, responsible for HIV programs in Brazil said:

"We view prostitutes as partners in the effort [to fight HIV], partners who are efficient and competent. Prostitution exists everywhere in the world, including the United States, and we have a commitment to work with this group and respect them." (To see read more about their action, go here: [http://www.ipsnews.net/new\\_notas.asp?idnews=28848](http://www.ipsnews.net/new_notas.asp?idnews=28848))

In 2006, at the World Aids Conference in Toronto, 200 sex workers from around the world demonstrated against the anti-prostitution pledge.



### 5. Has anything changed since 2003?

Three large NGOs sued the US government to make them stop requiring the anti-prostitution pledge. These are the Alliance for Open Society International, Pathfinder, and DKT International. In May 2006, a judge decided that the anti-prostitution pledge no longer applied to American groups but- the court decided *it still applied to international groups and projects, even those run by American groups.*

When President Obama was elected in 2008, he made some changes to PEPFAR. He removed the abstinence and faithfulness requirement, but still directed that these needed to be prioritized over comprehensive prevention (that includes condom-use). He removed the restriction on organizations who give information or services related to abortion...but he kept the anti-prostitution pledge ! Boo !



### 4. Does this really affect me?

The most directly affected are sex worker projects or groups who got or get funding from the US government but it also affects groups that would like to get funding but can't anymore.

All sex workers should be concerned though, out of solidarity for those affected but also because the US government has tried to influence foreign governments and UN bodies with its anti-sex work position. According to the Associated Press, in 2006 the US blocked a World Health Organization resolution for universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment because it opposed the mentioning of needle-exchange, sex workers, drug users and gay men. Then, in 2007, the United States pushed the UN to issue a "Guidance Note on Sex Work and HIV" that was very conservative and focused more on stopping sex work, than stopping HIV.

### 6. What can I do to protest the Anti-Prostitution Pledge?

You can sign this petition on-line and encourage all those you know to sign it as well:

<http://www.petitiononline.com/HHS1209/petition.html>

### 7. Where can I learn more and follow what happens ?

To watch a short video by sex workers about the impact of the anti-prostitution pledge, go to:

- <http://blip.tv/file/181155>

To read a letter opposing the anti-prostitution pledge written by Human Rights Watch and signed by more than 200 organizations, go to:

- <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2005/05/17/us-restrictive-policies-undermine-anti-aids-efforts>

For more detailed information, see:

- <http://www.genderhealth.org/loyaltyoath.php>
- [http://www.pepfarwatch.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=23&Itemid=37](http://www.pepfarwatch.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=23&Itemid=37)
- <http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040207>
- <http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/blog/2008/09/10/perpetuating-prostitution-pledge-allegiance-failure>

Updates to the situation are posted here:

- [www.genderhealth.org](http://www.genderhealth.org) and on the fabulous website of sex worker activist Carol Leigh:
- [www.bayswan.org](http://www.bayswan.org)

Also see Anti-Prostitution Pledge Timeline here:

- <http://swannet.org/node/1693>



## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

*"We had nowhere to sleep. There were two wooden benches. We sat on the floor, it was wet, people would urinate as we were sitting there, like cattle. I didn't have any air to breathe. When I asked for a doctor, they said there is nothing wrong with you. When I remember that image, I get very upset. Terribly."*

— Nevrie, Macedonia on being detained by the police

## Publications

### State Regulations and Policies to Control Sex Work Cause Human Rights Violations in Austria

The Sex Workers' Forum of Vienna has submitted a shadow report to the UN Committee Against Torture which is reviewing Austria's compliance with international agreements on preventing torture this April. Sex work in Austria is legal if sex workers are registered with authorities and undergo mandatory medical exams.

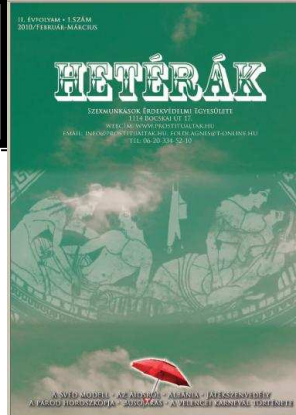


Sex Workers' Forum reports that sex workers regularly receive degrading treatment in the course of such

medical exams from the Vienna communal health office. They further denounce degrading treatment on the part of police who use under-cover operations to arrest unlicensed sex workers and charge them with misdemeanors. They report that stigmatization of sex workers leads to impunity for crimes against them. Finally, they also denounce the lack of employment options for female asylum seekers, that restrict many women to sex work.

The PDF of the report is available at this link:  
[http://www.sexworker.at/sexworker\\_uncat.pdf](http://www.sexworker.at/sexworker_uncat.pdf)

To read International news please visit SWAN website at <http://swannet.org/en/taxonomy/term/2>



### Second Issue of the Newsletter of the Sex Workers' Association in Hungary is out

Issue 1 of 2010 features a long interview with Swedish SW Pye Jacobson, who tells the readers about the legal regulation of sex work in Sweden and its consequences on SWs and their clients. There is an article about the current phase of the AIDS epidemic and the means of protection. This is followed by a country profile of Albania, with an insight into the local commercial

sex scene. There is an article on the hazards of gambling as a type of addiction and its adverse social consequences. Readers are acquainted with the history of the Busho-march, the famous and traditional early-spring masquerade in the streets of Mohács, Hungary. Finally, there is an article on the Venice Carnival.

The Hungarian Association are in the process of officially changing their name from Hungarian Prostitutes' Advocacy Association to Hungarian Sex Workers' Advocacy Association. The reason behind the change – as explained by representative András Szabó – is that the expression “sex worker” is much less burdened with the stigmata and prejudices regularly associated with the term “prostitute”. The change will, therefore, place the organization in a better position regarding the tone of the public discourse on the rights of sex workers.

You can download the newsletter PDF here:  
[http://swannet.org/files/swannet/File/Documents/Heterak\\_2szammailhez\\_jan2010.pdf](http://swannet.org/files/swannet/File/Documents/Heterak_2szammailhez_jan2010.pdf)

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