

## **PRESS-RELEASE**

### **RIGHTS GROUPS DENOUNCE ABUSE AND DISCRIMINATION OF SEX WORKERS**

*Budapest, Hungary, December 17, 2010*

On December 17, organizations and groups supporting human rights for sex workers will hold various events to bring public attention to the issues of violence and injustice towards sex workers and their families in Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers aims to raise awareness of the violence and abuse perpetrated on sex workers, while remembering those who have been its victims. At the same time, this is the day for unity among sex workers and their allies all over the world to show the strength and determination to end abuse and ensure equal rights for sex workers.

SWAN asks all allies – individuals and organizations – to support the petition of Ukrainian sex workers' rights organization Ukrainian League Legalife addressing the President to repeal the article 181, Part 1 of the Administrative Code of Ukraine. While rendering sex work an administrative offense, this law has opened the door to physical and sexual abuse, blackmail and harassment by law enforcement officers and drove sex workers underground and away from any kind of protection. Such situation has put sex workers' to even greater risk of violence and HIV infection.

#### **PETITION TO PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE**

TO: President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich

Copies:

Prime Minister of Ukraine, Mykola Azarov

Ombudswoman of the Parliament of Ukraine, Nina Karpachova

Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Anatoliy Mogyliyov

Minister of Health, Zynoviy Mytnyk

Dear Mr. President!

We, the representatives of the charitable organization "Ukrainian League" Legalife" and other Ukrainian and international organizations working in the sphere of HIV/AIDS prevention consider our civic duty to draw your attention to the following matter.

In 2010 in Ukraine, sexual transmission of HIV has become dominant among other ways of HIV/AIDS infection, exceeding in number the "traditional" way of infecting through blood. According to the Ukrainian Center for HIV/AIDS Prevention, in 2009 there were more than 12 000 cases of sexual transmission of HIV. Obviously, today the main efforts of the state and public organizations working in the sphere of public health have to be primarily targeted at preventing the spread of HIV through sexual contacts.

However, we must admit that today the most vulnerable social groups to HIV infection not only have a very limited access to prevention and treatment of this and other socially dangerous diseases, but also constantly suffer from harassment and violation of their personal rights by the law-enforcement officers. These are the women who provide sexual services (according to the international terminology - "commercial sex workers").

From our organization's practical experience in providing social assistance to sex workers, and according to many witness testimonies, we can declare of the systematic and massive character of violations of human rights of sex workers in Ukraine.

Officers of the law enforcement authorities, particularly police patrols, extensively use the Article 181, Part 1 of the Administrative Code of Ukraine to cover their brutal and illegal actions, such as sexual, physical and psychological violence, blackmailing, threats and intimidations, fabrication of criminal cases and other crimes conducted against sex workers. Harassed in this way by the law enforcement's attitudes and

practices, women of sex business are scared to seek protection from policemen's and clients' aggression, and often do not ask for medical aid on time.

In the current circumstances, it is of significant importance for this social group to gain free access to HIV/AIDS prevention programs, early diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections and psycho-social services. Social isolation of sex workers impedes the receiving of the qualitative medical services, and often – blocks the access to these women completely.

Based on current situation and mentioned above facts, we appeal to you, Mr. President, to abolish the administrative penalty for providing sexual services.

We are convinced that cancellation of the Article 181 Part 1 of the Code of Ukraine on Administrative Offences will allow:

1. to decrease the number of violations conducted by policemen towards sex workers, removing the official "protective wall" for their illegal actions;
2. to enhance access to social and medical services for this vulnerable social group, to establish cooperation between state and non-governmental organizations for timely diagnosis and effective treatment of HIV infection, sexually transmitted diseases and other socially dangerous illnesses;
3. to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS in Ukraine via sexual transmission through efficient implementation of information and prevention programs for sex workers on safe sex practices.

We also point out, that similar practices are already successfully implemented in other countries of the world: for instance, in Kyrgyzstan there is no criminal or administrative penalty for sex work. This fact had a positive impact on relations between the law enforcement authorities, sex workers and non-governmental organizations, which implement HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs in the country.

We greatly rely for your decisive actions targeted on protection of vulnerable groups' rights in Ukraine and we are ready to closely cooperate with the government to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in Ukraine.

Sincerely,

- Iryna Mishyna, Chairwoman, Charitable Organization "Ukrainian League" Legalife"
- Olena Tsuckerman, Deputy Chairwoman, Charitable Organization "All-League" Legalife"  
Member of Charitable Foundation "Drop In Center", Kyiv
- Natalya Melnychenko, Board Member, Charitable Organization "Ukrainian League" Legalife"  
Director of the Foundation "Volya", Uman
- Natalya Isaeva, Member of the charitable organization "Ukrainian League" Legalife", Kirovograd

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To sign the Petition, please send your Name, Organization, City and Country to the local SWAN member or to SWAN coordinator at [swan@swannet.org](mailto:swan@swannet.org) or fill in online at <http://www.petitiononline.com/ukrswan/petition.html>

More about SWAN at [WWW.SWANNET.ORG](http://WWW.SWANNET.ORG)

More about global movement for sex workers' rights at <http://nswp.org>