

**Oral Intervention for CEDAW discussion on the General Recommendation on Trafficking in Women and Girls in the Context of Global Migration**

**18th February 2019**

Madam Chair, and distinguished members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the CEDAW Committee on the general recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration.

I am here on behalf of sex worker led organisations SWARM and Decrim Now. Within our networks we serve 1000’s of sex workers across the United Kingdom and we work with sex workers and human rights advocates across the globe.

In recent years, a growing number of state governments and policy makers have centred the demand for the purchase of sex as the ‘root cause’ of trafficking and violence against women and girls, and thus have spearheaded the implementation of legislative models which attempt to disrupt sex work through criminalisation in the hope of reducing trafficking. As sex workers we are acutely aware of the violence women can experience in prostitution; however, we contend that the criminalisation of sex work and migration cement and intensify these harms particularly for the most marginalised and vulnerable sex workers - those who are undocumented, transgender, poor, disabled, indigenous or racialised.

SWARM, Decrim Now and other sex worker led organisations worldwide understand that sex work is a strategy for seeking livelihood that - like other marginalised or informal forms of work, is too often done under exploitative conditions. In our view, the pathway to an improvement in the lives of people selling sex is through decriminalisation, collective organising to improve labour conditions, and efforts to remove the factors which drive exploitation in the industry: restrictive migration policies, stigma and criminalisation of sex work, police violence, homelessness, and poverty.

Mainstream “anti-trafficking” policy, which relies on police raids and deportations, makes this harm worse, not better. Sex workers frequently experience police raids as traumatic, terrifying experiences and to refer to them as “rescue operations” is bitterly ironic. Sex workers have phones and earnings seized, face sudden loss of their income; and migrant sex workers are taken into immigration detention and deported.

We know that there is a significant lack of reliable evidence to prove that trafficking is reduced by criminalising sex work; while there is concrete evidence from the WHO, UNAIDs, the Lancet, Médecin du Monde, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch showing that criminalisation in any form materially harms sex workers.

Trafficking is a highly complex, global issue that will not end without long-term, systemic and radical change. However, there are changes states and policy makers could introduce immediately that would make a difference to improve the lives of victims of exploitation in the sex industry. Many of these would also benefit victims of trafficking in other industries.

We call on the Committee to recommend the:

* Decriminalisation of consensual adult sex work by removing laws criminalising sex workers, their clients and third parties.
* Introduction of a strict principle of non-prosecution of victims for any offence when they come forward to report exploitation and training for police to ensure this is adhered to.
* Creation of firewalls to end data-sharing between public services and police and immigration operations -- this practice deters people in the sex industry from accessing vital healthcare for fear of negative repercussions.
* Adoption of fast-tracked pathways to permanent residence and citizenship for victims of trafficking who wish to remain in the their host state, and assistance to claim asylum if they will be at risk of re-trafficking or other violence if deported to their country of origin.
* Funding of support victims of trafficking need: economic support, adequate housing, legal representation, language and education support, free medical treatment and trauma-informed counselling.
* Ending of the hostile environment towards migrants by removing restrictive and punitive migration policies.
* Abolition of the cruel and inhumane practice of immigration detention.