

# Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

## An NGO in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC, UN



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Submission to: The thematic report to the UN Human Rights Council at its 56th session in June 2024 and will examine the nexus between the global phenomenon of prostitution and violence against women and girls

### **Extract from the Position Paper of the Congregation of Our Lady of Chairty of the Good Shepherd on Prostitution**

“The prostitution of women and girls is an ancient form of gender violence that is structurally embedded in societies. Socio/cultural perceptions and attitudes about relationships between men and women reinforce the system’s strength. Prostitution is rooted in economic systems, structured within a globalized economy that has seen rapid growth of women in extreme poverty. Political structures and systems that devalue and exclude women and do not evaluate gender outcomes of social policy give prostitution acceptance. The root causes of prostitution are tied to poverty, patriarchy, male privilege, extreme wealth, racist attitudes, militarization, ecological degradation, inadequate family support, and the demand by men for women to be available for sexual purchase. The rapid global expansion of human trafficking as a criminal industry has increased the demand for girls and women to be objects of prostitution. Likewise, lack of people-centered and rights-based migration policies increase the incidence of human trafficking and prostitution.

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd (OLCGS) recognize that the multiple harms of prostitution make it an egregious form of discrimination. Our position on prostitution is rooted in the dignity of the human person. It echoes the UN 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others that says, “prostitution is incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person, and endangers the welfare of the individual, the family and the community...” Prostitution by its nature is exploitative and is never part of a decent work agenda. The idea that women are

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commodities available to be consumed and exploited has no place in a society striving for gender equality.

OLCGS ... rejects the notion that a person in prostitution is a “sex worker”; prostitution is not a profession nor is it in harmony with a view that work is a sacred contribution to human development and the social fabric.

OLCGS first response is to express solidarity with those who are vulnerable to being the objects of prostitution. We seek to listen to the experiences of these persons, accompany them in their personal journeys and develop, with them, holistic programs to meet their needs. We support women and girls in healing, self-sufficiency through employable skills, economic and personal growth opportunities, and reconciliation with often-estranged families.

OLCGS seeks to be active in processes of social change. We engage in the international debate on the nature of prostitution; we seek changes in outdated national laws and policies; we support the changes in national laws that have been happening since 1999 when Sweden adopted a policy of zero tolerance for buyers of sex.”

**Response Question 1:** The term ‘sex industry’ encapsulates hidden forms of prostitution and relates to activities including: online webcamming and selling images and videos; pornography; lap dancing; stripping; indoor and outdoor prostitution; and sex trafficking.

The activities named are well organized within the sex industry – and are profit making enterprises for the pimps.

**Response Questions 2:** See Pathways to Exit: A Study of women’s journeys out of prostitution and the Response to their complex needs This is research that may inform your consultation – <https://www.ruhama.ie/press-releases-enquiries/> or

[https://www.ruhama.ie/wp-content/uploads/SERP\\_PathwaystoExit\\_FULL\\_Final-1.pdf](https://www.ruhama.ie/wp-content/uploads/SERP_PathwaystoExit_FULL_Final-1.pdf)

Page 34 1.1 Early experiences of adversity, and Page 38 1.2 Entry into Prostitution

Page 65 In summary: the above findings starkly demonstrate the many vulnerabilities, adversities and coercive forces that draw women into the sex trade and often serve to keep them trapped within it. It reveals, once again, the profound harms of prostitution and the serious levels of sexual violence and sexual exploitation women are subjected to within the trade, which have significant, traumatic and often long-term consequences for their health and wellbeing. Given the abuses to which they are subjected, it is unsurprising that the majority of women wish to exit prostitution and are simply seeking a better life, but many face significant barriers to doing so.

**Response Question 3:** - See Report : *Men who pay for sex in Germany and what they teach us about the failure of legal prostitution: a 6-country report on the sex trade from the perspective of the socially invisible ‘freiers’.*

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By Melissa Farley, Inge Kleine, Kerstin Neuhaus, Yoanna McDowell, Silas Shulz, Saskia Nitschmann. [View the report](#)

New report on 763 sex buyers in 6 countries released November 8, 2022 in Berlin PRE and partners report the results of research that investigates the attitudes and behavior of sex buyers/punters/Freier/puteros in Germany, USA, India, UK, Scotland, Cambodia.

Page 34 “Prostitution is the purchase of a sex act or the exchange of a sex act for goods such as food, shelter, or drugs. In order for such a sale or exchange to occur, there must be an objectified, dehumanized, and commodified class of women, usually poor and most frequently ethnically marginalized, who are sold for sex to men who are more privileged. This commodification requires objectification, a process that transforms people into objects with economic value (Sharp, 2000). A pimp explained commodification at its most basic level: “I took the kind of girl no one would miss so when they were resold, no one would look for them. It is as if I sold a kilo of bread” (Crumley, Simmons, & Schoenthal, 1993).”

**Response to Question 4:** See [Ruhama Report](#) Page 40 “Interviewees described specific incidents of harm they sustained at the hands of buyers, pimps and traffickers, including being beaten, raped, and sexually, emotionally and physically assaulted.”

**Response Question 5:** Normalizing the purchase of sexual acts and the objectification of women, leads to an increase in male demand for sexual acts, as well as sex tourism. Demand is fueled by the ‘sex trade’ and recruitment into this life style is often a booming business for purveyors of the sex trade and a source of satisfaction and gratification for its users. It is devoid of humanity, of dignity of the person and human rights. Demand is rooted in patriarchal and misogynistic systems. It commodifies and objectifies girls and women who are bought and sold, to be used and abused at the whim of the buyer. Laws legalizing the sex trade promote prostitution. Weak implementation of the UN Protocol to Prevent Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Person, growth of the Porn industry, lack of international laws regulating new and emerging technologies are all responsible.

**Response Question 6:** Prostitution causes harm not only to the girl or woman but to the person who purchases sex. The experience of being prostituted multiple times in a day is dehumanizing and traumatizing and as such is a form of gender-based violence. The transaction is devoid of dignity, respect and mutuality and as such violates the humanity of persons engaged and their human rights.

**Response Questions 7:** Scholarly and well researched evidence on the links between pornography and other forms of sexual exploitation and prostitution are available at Culture Reframed <https://culturereframed.org/resources/reports/> the premier science-based, global organization of scholars, professionals, and activists addressing the harms of pornography to youth whose Founder and President is Dr. Gail Dines.

**Response Question 8:** Throughout the world – in all countries it is mostly girls and women who are economically poor and marginalized – who are simultaneously suffering class

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oppression, exclusion and racism – who are being used in prostitution. Is this consent? Consent in these situations demand and examination of power dynamics – and these scenarios are ones of unequal power relations. Further already traumatized and exploited girls and women who experience sexual violence or a have a history of childhood abuse are vulnerable to grooming leading to further exploitation and abuse.

I quote from an (unpublished audit of women attending WISHES [Woman Inclusive Sexual Health Extended Service] in Lothian, 2019). “ Of all women attending a sexual health service for those with complex and high need in Edinburgh, only 3% identified prostitution as being a free and positive choice. From the same group, 40% reported experience of sexual violence, and 75% gave a history of childhood abuse (including neglect, and physical and/or sexual abuse) (unpublished audit of women attending WISHES [Woman Inclusive Sexual Health Extended Service] in Lothian, 2019). This is in line with previous statistics.<sup>4</sup> Bindel J. *The Pimping of Prostitution: Abolishing the Sex Work Myth*. London: Palgrave, Macmillan; 2019. [[Google Scholar](#)]

The imbalance of power and poverty in transactional sex is exploitative because girls and women feel they have no other option. This imbalance nullifies the concept of choice. The main driver is lack of economic opportunities and access to social protection.

**Response Question 9:** The Nordic/Equality/Abolitionist model is effective in preventing and responding to violence against girls and women in prostitution in the countries where it has been adopted. The model recognizes prostitution as a form of violence against women and is based on 5 pillars:

- The full decriminalization of all prostituted persons
- The provision of comprehensive exit pathways for prostituted person
- The fight against the demand for the purchase of sexual acts through criminalizing the purchase of sexual acts / sex buyers
- The fight against pimping and trafficking through criminalizing any form of profit made on the prostitution of another person.
- The implementation of sensitization campaigns towards the men and boys in particular, and training of frontline services

The implementation of Universal Social Protection and Universal Child Benefits would greatly empower girls and women who experience poverty and are vulnerable to prostitution.

**Response Question 11:** See Publication from [Ruhama](#) – a service provider in Ireland

**Response Question 12:** Obstacles faced by organizations and frontline service providers include lack of funding for such projects and lack of access to service need to help victims become survivors and thrive. Access to professional psychological, educational and employment are huge challenges. The complexity of issues faced by survivors are insurmountable with skilled intervention on multiple levels.

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### **Response Question 13:**

**Response Question 14:** The empowerment of survivors in recent years has led to increased opportunities for survivors to exercise their own voice on panels and at policy making tables. The change has begun but often remains at the level of tokenism. Overall, frontline organizations and survivor organizations are not sufficiently included.

### **Response Question 15:**

- End the 'sex trade,' end commercial sexual exploitation.
- Implement gender equality.
- Continue to deconstruct the notions of male privilege and entitlement
- Challenge the culture of prostitution and pornography
- Strategically and systematically move from a culture of impunity to one of accountability.

### **Conclusion:**

The argument continues today – is prostitution the oldest profession or the oldest oppression? The nexus between the global phenomenon of prostitution and violence against girls and women is one of power and profit on the one hand and poverty, and marginalization on the other. Patriarchy, Misogyny – a system and set of attitudes rooted in the power of men over women informs, drives and ensures support for the system of prostitution, while poverty and lack of opportunities subject girls and women to untold violence and discrimination. These vulnerable girls and women are easy prey – lured by the prospects of a better life – economic and social. Prostitution is a system of global oppression. Men being able to buy girls and women is part of the patriarchy at the basis of our global community. Our struggle against prostitution is rooted in upholding the dignity and human rights of every girl and woman while challenging well-funded and organized groups that seek to uphold this patriarchal and misogynistic system of prostitution and systematic violence by promoting the term 'sex work' and the sex trade. This view point glamorizes the sex trade and seeks to 'normalize' what is in fact a globally accepted, systemically orchestrated violence against girls and women and a violation of their human rights.

Submitted by Winifred Doherty on behalf of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd with a ministry presence in 68 countries around the world.

January 30, 2024

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