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**Submission to the Call for input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the Human Rights Council on prostitution and Violence against women and girls**

**Italy 30.01.2024**

Weavers of Hope Aps, is a non profit organization founded by survivors of sex trafficking in Italy, we work with victims and survivors of sex trafficking by empowering them to regain their freedom and lost dignity, we carryout campaigns and sensitization on the phenomeno of sex trafficking and prostitution.

To some of these questions, we are responding as migrants survivors of sex trafficking in Italy, we were recruited and introduced into the sex industry in Italy held under the controll of our perpetrators with constant humilations, intimidation, threats, sexual abuse and physical abuse, as adult many believe that it is our choice to prostitute on the Italian streets, brothels and connection houses and also behind the webcam, mostly migrant women are seen as poor people who ran away from poverty and want to do anything to support their poor families, One thing to know about being recruited into the sex industry is that when you get involved those related to you by blood mostly in your country of origin also get threatened and assaulted at any of your mistakes and refusal it is all about financial gains for the perpetrator and sexual satifaction for the client while we are commodities on sales, we were not free but were always forced to smile to make outsiders think that is our choice to prostitute but behind those smile are cries for freedom, surviving that circuits is not a thing of a joke, and we do want our courage and decision to be jeopardised by ignoring us and all that we have to say about our experiences, we once worn the shoes and we know were it hurts. The role of survivors are important in policy and decision making process but our recognition and involvement at both the local, state and international level is still very low.

Prostitution is seen as the oldest profession in the world and these made it to be widely socially tolerated,but the consumer are always mostly invisible. An increase in the demand in prostitution correspondingly lead to the increase in the supply of vulnerable women and girls and this also increase sex trafficking as more vulnerable and marginalised women and girls are recruited and sold for sexual use and held down with systematic method of brainwashing, indoctrination and physical control.

There is a drastic shift in the modality of prostitution due to the digital age that brings about new technological methods and forms of prostitution that can be defined as hidden forms of prostitution, technology has shifted the method of advertising and sales from the streets to the digital domain and have led to a tremendous rise in sites and apps, webcam, for the purpose of purchase of online erotic performances, sale of erotic, sexual act performance videos, nude photos, images without the informed and conscious consent of prostituited women and girls, these sites and Apps are mostly controlled by pimps, loverboys, and brothel owners that mostly have the power over the prostituted women.

According to the CODACONS 2023 report on prostitution in Italy, it involves 90 thousand prostitutes, 10% minors, 55% foreign girls .CODACONS was cited by istat as the source of data on prostitution8[» PROSTITUZIONE, CODACONS: BUSINESS DA 4,5 MILIARDI DI EURO. 3 MILIONI DI CLIENTI E 90.000 LAVORATRICI STABILI](https://codacons.it/prostituzione-codacons-business-da-45-miliardi-di-euro-3-milioni-di-clienti-e-90-000-lavoratrici-stabili/))

Majority of these women are from vulnerable background ( low socio –economic classes, from the most disadvantaged ethnic minorities and poor countries) and dysfuntional families, their level of education usually very low, the perpetrators take advantage of this knowledge about them and exploite their vulnerable situation. For majority of the women and girls in prostitution,it is an available option and not a free choice because they are forced in various ways either by condition of poverty and economic needs, or because they are exploited by pimps, traffickers, or others who may likely be in position to take advantage of them. From our own personal experiences, prostitution can not just be a choice if there is no hidding extreme poverty and condition of profound vulnerability.

Violence is the norm for women and girls in prostitution, the difference between prostitution and other types of gender violence is the payment of money for the abuse and this payment of money can not cancel all that we know about sexual assault, rape and physical violence.

Prostitution is extremely dangerous for women and girls, being treated like commodities into which men (consumers) masturbate and from which perpetrator draws their financial gains , causing immense psychological harm. Prostittution comes with experiences of being hunted down, controlled , dominated, sexually harassed and assaulted, and all the involved systematic methods of brainwashing, indoctrination and physical control that are used by the perpetrators against women and girls in prostitution and these literally lead to depressions, lethal suicidality, mood disorders, anxiety disorders dissociative disorders and chemical dependence. prostitution is internally damaging. Failure to address the systemic social problems that lead women and girls to prostitution and by considering and generally accepting it as an acceptable option for women and girls which has further legitimate it to be considered as “sex Work”, to us that are survivors is a violence.

Prostitution is a violation of the foundamental rights of women and girls that involves the exploitation and perpetration of violence on the women body and is incompatible with gender equality, The majority of the consumers of women in prostitution are men, The payment that is involved is translated as the exercise of economic power by the consumer to buy the consent for a temporary owership of the body of the woman to be used as an object in his possession, from our experience as survivors , women and girls should be freed from this minace and should be given alternative to live a dignified life.

To be able to help women exit prostitution as survivor’s organisation, a non compromised legal frame work is important and a legislation that favours proper reintegration programs, not untill it is understood that prostitution and trafficking can appear voluntary but are not really free choices made from a range of options, it will be difficult to provide an adequate support to assist those who wish to escape but have no other economic choices. The conditions that make genuine consent possible are absent from prostitution: equal economic power with consumers, physical safety and real alternatives.

Women and girls in prostitution are already suffering from social exclusion, there should be a kind of model (Equality model) that can garanteed them effective protection in terms of health, social, educational and economic, and also a policy that will give them the possibility to take back their power, agency and independent.