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Media Release 4 December 2013
When You Criminalise Our Clients, You Criminalise Us:
Australian Sex Workers Oppose French Bill

‘The Bill to criminalise clients of sex workers being debated in French Parliament on December 4 will severely endanger the lives and working conditions of sex workers if passed’, says Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association.

Scarlet Alliance CEO Janelle Fawkes states that ‘The Bill will reduce sex workers’ choice and autonomy over clients and working conditions, isolate and displace workers, pose barriers to accessing health services and justice, drive sex workers underground and increase stigma and discrimination.’

There has been a high level of confusion and conflation from Australian media reporting on the Bill, who have relied upon anti-sex work advocates instead of consulting with sex worker organisations.

Fawkes states, ‘This is not a Bill for decriminalisation. It is a Bill for criminalisation. When you criminalise clients, you criminalise sex workers. It is sex workers who will lose out from this Bill.’

Parliamentarians in France have openly stated that the Bill is a drive to abolish sex work and the sex industry. ‘To say that this Bill will decriminalise sex work is untrue. In any case, the impact of criminalising one of the two parties involved is that police detection and surveillance is on both the client and the sex worker. When police are the regulators of the sex industry it is sex workers that experience the brunt of corruption.’

Even though some reporting states that sex workers may not be the intended target group, the experience from Sweden, where this model has been in place since 1999, illustrates serious adverse effects of criminal laws upon sex workers.

‘The Swedish Model has proven to be a decade-long failure’, says Fawkes. ‘In Sweden, it is illegal to rent a room to a sex worker, meaning that sex workers’ autonomy is impacted and legal rights are reduced for fear of detection. Adult children living at home from their parents’ earnings have been charged with “pimping” and sex workers cannot work together, advertise or hire security. Police stake out sex workers’ workplaces and, as a result, clients will only meet in public locations to avoid detection. In Sweden, laws criminalising clients are actively and maliciously used against sex workers.’

Evidence from Sweden illustrates that the criminalisation of clients has no effect in reducing the size of the sex industry. In its own evaluation of the laws, the Swedish Government was forced to admit that evidence was inconclusive on any reduction in the size of the industry. By comparison, research from Australia illustrates that decriminalisation – the United Nations best practice approach – does not increase the size of the sex industry.

'It is important to understand that there is also a cultural impact of this model of regulation. Sex workers in Sweden are seen as lesser people who have made bad decisions. When sex workers are in custody battles, reporting crime or accessing services, they face discrimination. This model of regulation does not protect women, as some feminists may describe; it creates an underclass whereby sex workers are loathed,' said Janelle Fawkes.

While sex workers in France protested outside their Parliament this week, Australian sex workers marched in a Red Umbrella Rally outside the Sydney Opera House, demanding rights and protections. 'Sex is work. Sex workers need decriminalisation, anti-discrimination protections, and human rights,' says Fawkes.

'Australian sex workers stand in solidarity with French sex workers opposing this Bill. France saw the birth of the sex worker rights in 1975. A vote for this Bill flies in the face of over 3 decades of evidence and sex worker organising for rights and safety.'

For media enquiries please contact Janelle Fawkes on 0411 985 135.

Resources

http://scarletalliance.org.au/issues/swedish_model/Swedish_briefing/

<http://rightswork.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Issue-Paper-4.pdf>

<http://xa.yimg.com/kq/groups/2834953/1982978694/name/Claimed%20Success%20and%20Documented%20Effects%2E%20Dodillet%20%26amp%3B%2>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7D7nOh57-l8>

<http://nothing-about-us-without-us.com/tag/swedish-model/>

<http://www.pla.qld.gov.au/Resources/PLA/reportsPublications/documents/THE%20BAN%20ON%20PURCHASING%20SEX%20IN%20SWEDEN%20-%20THE%20SWEDISH%20MODEL.pdf>