
SCARLET ALLIANCE BRINGS SEX WORKER MIGRATION TO CANBERRA

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Sex work is work.... Travel is dream of sex workers. I think it not only dream of sex workers.... It is a dream, it means it is like, they can make money to support their family, but they can't money to go to holiday, because there is no money to go on holiday, they work in Thailand, but they have not enough money to get family getting better — just for survive and little bit of support. But when they see some worker goes to overseas, not just only Australia, they go to America... when they come back, this family have a good life, have a big house, have some fulung, husband, come to support them, they think, I want to go overseas. Me too. When I am in Thailand first time.... I think 'One day I think I want to go overseas.'... My cousin she come to Australia, and she always support us. We are big family, and I think, I need to help her to support my family, and I need to have good life for my family, I going to come to Australia.²

Globalisation has created an internationalised labour force who visualise themselves within an international market. Migrant sex workers are a subset of this labour force, their patterns of migration correlating with general migration trends and their motivations similar to those of other international workers, such as a favourable exchange rate in the destination country or changes to visa accessibility. Sex worker migration can also be influenced by sex industry trends and policing practices in their home countries, where the prospect of violent raids and criminal charges may encourage sex workers to seek a safer working environment elsewhere. Examples of this include Hong Kong police keeping migrant sex workers in public cages in June 2005.³ 2006 raids in southern China resulted in over 100 Chinese sex workers and clients being publicly shamed on the streets of Shenzhen.⁴ In 2004 red light districts in South Korea were closed down, and more recently police arrested over twenty thousand sex workers and clients in massive raids of businesses where sex work took place.⁵

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² Chimkit Jum , *Trafficking*, paper presented at the 2nd annual Scarlet Alliance 'Globalised Sex Work' Seminar, Albion Street Centre, Sydney, 16 April 2008

³ Zi Teng "Zi Teng report Police abuse of migrant sex workers" June 2005 [<http://www.scarletalliance.org.au/nm/int/hk/05/0605/> viewed 19 May 2008]

⁴ French Howard W 'As Vice Dragnet Recalls Bad Old Days, Chinese Cry Out' *New York Times* 13 December 2006 [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/13/world/asia/13prostitutes.html?_r=1&oref=slogin viewed 19 May 2008]

⁵ 'South Korea Arrests 24,000 In Prostitution Crackdown' *Asian Sex Gazette* 14 November 2007 [<http://www.asiansexgazette.com/asg/korea/korea03news32.htm> viewed 20 May 2008]

Australia has a legal or decriminalised sex industry which offers sex workers a legal workplace, in contrast to their home country. Unfortunately, the arrests, public shaming and media spectacle these sex workers were hoping to escape have become a characteristic of Australian anti-trafficking efforts in recent years. High profile brothel raids by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the Australian Federal Police have increased particularly in Sydney and Melbourne, which the media are routinely invited to attend. Immigration officials have, in group settings, requested that sex workers one by one show their passports and visa status, thus exposing their real names and birth places in an environment where confidentiality and non-disclosure is the norm. The interviews are documented and photographed by the media and the sex workers' identities subsequently revealed through the press⁶. In a recent raid, a section of Crown Street in Surry Hills, Sydney, was cordoned off by police tape and vehicles on the footpath. Journalists were permitted to photograph the sex workers as they were led from the brothel by Immigration Officials, with only a towel around their heads to attempt to hide their identity⁷. Most of the sex workers involved in these raids are ultimately found to have been working lawfully with no evidence of trafficking or slavery. This approach is in stark contrast to that which occurs in suspected trafficking or exploitation cases in other industries.

There has been no comprehensive evaluation of the Australian response to trafficking to date, nor have sex workers been adequately consulted about the extent of trafficking in the Australian sex industry. As is often the case in sex industry debate, sex workers' voices are the last to be heard and their expert opinions least likely to be validated. This general lack of understanding of migrant sex work issues, coupled with unprecedented media attention, has led to an abundance of myths and misunderstanding about trafficking and sexual servitude in Australia. Most disturbing has been the gradual conflation of trafficking, sex slavery, migrant labour and sex work itself.

Scarlet Alliance, the Australian Sex Workers Association, makes a very clear distinction between migrant sex workers, contract workers and victims of trafficking and/or sexual servitude. Contract work, often referred to as 'debt bondage', is where a third party arranges the travel, accommodation, visa and employment. Upon entering Australia, the migrant sex worker works to pay back the costs incurred by the agent, plus a generous profit margin. The debts raised are often substantial and the working conditions may, in some cases, be less than desirable, but lack of access to visas leaves migrant sex workers with few other choices when planning to travel to Australia. Most contract workers previously worked as sex workers in their home country and actively sought out the assistance of the agent, in the same way that workers in other occupations agree to conditional re-location packages or other financial incentives to work overseas, or in rural and remote areas of Australia.

⁶ Mercer Neil, 'Smuggled to slave as prostitutes' *Courier Mail* June 03, 2007 [<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,21841046-953,00.html> viewed 20 May 2008]

⁷ Lawrence Kara 'Sydney's 'sex slave' brothels' *The Associated Press* March 7 2008 [<http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,23330089-5001021,00.html> viewed 20 May 2008]

Less than 400 sex workers a year (less than 2% of the entire Australian sex work labour force) enter Australia on a contract.⁸ In any 12 — 18 month period, Scarlet Alliance and our member organisations encounter less than 10 cases of sex workers working under potentially exploitative contracts.⁹ These figures, based on first-hand contact with migrant sex workers, are vastly different to the claims of ‘1,000 sex slaves’ made by *The Australian* newspaper in 2003/2004.¹⁰ The diverse figures are indicative of oppositional understandings of slavery and trafficking within the public sphere. Laura Agustin argues that this numbers slippage is systemic within western approaches to sex work.¹¹ For example, the Australian newspaper and *The Daily Telegraph* both chose to use the term ‘sex slave’ in headlines of stories that were actually about migrant sex workers. A second example was found in the High Court last month. Different understandings of slavery and/or migrant sex work, contributing different understandings of the size of the issue, created this exchange between Justice Kirby and WJ Abraham QC, taken from the reporting in *The Age*:

Justice Kirby said it would be naive ‘if we did not keep in the back of our mind that there are very large movements of populations in the world today, including of commercial sex workers ... who do so for economic advancement, and that is just part of the reality of the world we live in.’

Ms Abraham replied: ‘It is considered, in effect, a modern form of slavery, because in many instances what is happening is similar to what happened in this instance.’¹²

Thus migrant sex workers in Australia are wrongly understood to be trafficked into slavery, and are the sole subject of anti-trafficking responses in Australia. Although the strategy was intended to address trafficking for the purposes of migrant labour exploitation across *all* trades and occupations, current efforts have focused almost exclusively on the sex industry and more specifically, sex workers from South East Asian countries. The contemporary anti-trafficking approach in Australia consists of extensive surveillance, detection, raid and forced rescue of migrant sex workers from their workplaces, even if they don’t consent to be taken into custody. Sex workers are at risk of losing their substantive visas when picked up in a raid, and being put onto a Criminal Justice Stay Visa by the Australian Federal Police, in order to facilitate an investigation. Investigations and raids routinely target ‘Asian brothels’, where the employees are predominantly Chinese, Thai or Korean, but they rarely occur in ‘Anglo brothels’. In those

⁸ Scarlet Alliance, *Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission, Inquiry into trafficking in women — sexual servitude* 26 September 2003 pg 7, [http://www.scarletalliance.org.au/library/traff_sub03 viewed 20 May 2008]

⁹ McMahon Maria, Official Committee Hansard, Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission, *Trafficking in women for sexual servitude*, 25 February 2004, pg 25 [http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au/piweb/Repository/Committee/Commjnt/Linked/3184-2.PDF viewed 19 May 2008]

¹⁰ O’Brien Natalie, Wynhausen Elisabeth and Elizabeth Colman ‘1000 sex slaves enter each year’ *The Australian Newspaper*, June 25, 2004

¹¹ Agustin Laura, *Sex At The Margin* Zed Books, 2007

¹² Kissane Karen ‘Judge warns many could be snared by slavery laws’ *The Age* May 14, 2008 [http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/judge-warns-many-could-be-snared-by-slavery-laws/2008/05/13/1210444438501.html viewed 19 May 2008]

establishments where women of various nationalities are employed, Immigration officials and police will generally question and detain only those of Asian appearance, while the Anglo women are free to go about their business. Often those Anglo women are in fact European, English or American tourists on working holidays, but their passports and visas aren't scrutinised because they don't fit the accepted stereotype of a 'trafficked sex slave'.

The consequences of this race-based approach have been far-reaching. At a local level, the rights of Asian sex workers, including those who are Australian-born, have been trampled. Some brothels are reluctant to hire Asian workers, for fear they could become a target for raids. Others have cashed in on the 'sex slave' hysteria, publicly denouncing their Asian competitors as illegal immigrants and disease carriers. In 2007, seven Korean sex workers were bound, gagged and terrorised during an attempted robbery of a known 'Asian brothel' in Perth, Western Australia. Police immediately notified Immigration officials, who accompanied them on their initial inspection of the crime scene, and the traumatised sex workers were detained while their legal status was determined. Without any evidence to support the claim, the media described the women as 'illegal immigrants' and within days, debate was raging over the spread of 'illegal brothels' run by 'crime gangs'.¹³ The women were subsequently found to be working lawfully. The police response in this case sends a strong message to migrant sex workers, who will probably now think twice before reporting crimes committed against them.

Internationally, anti-trafficking strategies have significantly impacted on women's mobility. A number of Asian countries have begun assessing the likelihood that visa applicants may be travelling across borders or overseas to engage in sex work and refusing applications on the basis of that assessment. In Thailand, for example, young single women are being denied visas to countries like Australia and the US. Like many anti-trafficking initiatives, these barriers actually *increase* the likelihood of trafficking and slavery. An inability to obtain the appropriate visa in order to travel independently leaves sex workers with little choice but to engage the services of an agent or middle man.

1.0 SECURITY AND PROSPERITY STREAM AT SUMMIT 2020

It is these contradictions in policy and the knowledge that many of the current practices are actually placing sex workers at increased risk, rather than protecting them from exploitation, that has driven Scarlet Alliance's campaign to make issues of migration and mobility a Government priority and ensure migrant sex workers' voices are heard in the political arena. We were presented with a golden opportunity to achieve that aim when nominations opened for the 2020 Summit. I was nominated by a number of sex workers within the Scarlet Alliance network and invited to attend the 2020 Summit in April as part of the Security and Prosperity stream. The talkfest was an initiative of the newly elected Labor Government, a gathering of Australia's 'best

¹³ 'Concern over illegal brothels in WA', *ABC*, 11 June 2007 [<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/06/11/1947468.htm> viewed 19 May 2008]

and brightest' to inform future directions on topics including education, health, productivity and climate change.

The Scarlet Alliance proposal to the 2020 Summit was for Australia to develop a comprehensive prevention campaign. Prosecution and punitive approaches are an important part of the strategy, but convictions should not be cause for celebration. Preventing the crime from happening in the first instance should be the measure of our success. This argument was made forcefully in an opinions piece in the Sydney Morning Herald prior to the summit,¹⁴ and during the 2020 summit, and was received with enthusiasm by all delegates, including the law enforcement people present. The first component of trafficking prevention is to develop a human rights based approach to labour mobility. Access to appropriate visa frameworks would cut out the role of the third party agent in the country of origin, making traffickers and middle men redundant. Trafficking prevention education at all stages of the migration journey, from country of origin to the workplace in the destination country, is the second component of an effective prevention program. The existing network of sex worker organisations in Australia (Scarlet Alliance), Thailand (Empower Foundation), Cambodia (Women's Network for Unity), and China (Zi Teng) are appropriately placed to develop, distribute, evaluate and report upon community driven peer education programs that inform and advise sex workers of their rights, responsibilities and labour conditions in their destination country. Concrete, reliable and dynamic information dissemination, community development and sex worker-led migration rights campaigns would augment a human rights approach to labour mobility, ensuring sex workers are able to travel and work without being vulnerable to situations of exploitation.

There has been no program of education and information about trafficking prevention in Australia to date, which is a major flaw in the Australian approach. The new laws were not accompanied by information for brothel owners, sex workers or the general public. The extensive peer education networks of sex worker organisations, services, networks and groups in Australia were left to interpret the effects of anti-trafficking strategies on our own. Until mid 2007 there was no hard copy information in community languages about the laws. The front cover of the only printed resource to date, funded by the Attorney General's office, portrayed an image of an Asian woman's face in a strangely fetishistic black and white photo, characteristic of the sensationalism (and inappropriate eroticism) often surrounding this issue. The content of the material, while factual and informative, tacitly supports the belief that sexual servitude is a common occurrence and assumes that trafficking within the sex industry is inevitable. Scarlet Alliance and our membership denies these assumptions and proposed at the 2020 Summit that trafficking and sex slavery, already anomalies in the Australian sex industry, could be completely eradicated if a human rights based prevention program was implemented.

There are relevant analogies. Lack of access to abortion, when abortion was illegal, led to women being exploited by backyard abortionists. Pro-choice advocates knew that legal abortions would reduce the associated health risks and allow women greater access to counselling and

¹⁴ Jeffrey's Elena 'Truth and Visas Will Set Migrant Sex Workers Free', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 April [http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/truth-and-visas-will-set-asian-sex-workers-free/2008/04/03/1206851098330.html viewed 19 May 2008]

support, but the moral hysteria surrounding abortion became a barrier to the introduction of the necessary law reform. Migrant sex workers are being exploited by migration agents who profit from their inability to access appropriate visas independently. Sex worker advocates know that adopting a human rights approach to sex worker migration and mobility will decrease the risk of exploitation and improve access to education and support, but the moral hysteria attached to sex work is a barrier to change.

While the vast majority of our 2020 Summit interactions were focused on policy proposals in relation to migrant sex worker rights, there were some outcomes that unfortunately fell into the ‘moral hysteria’ category. Journalist Andrew Bolt ‘broke the news’ of our attendance with this comment: ‘Among Australia’s 1000 ‘best and brightest’ being assembled by Kevin Rudd for his summit is Elena Jeffreys of Scarlet Alliance, the prostitutes’ collective. A collective of prostitutes seems utterly appropriate in a way. But beyond that, words fail me,¹⁵ and followed up the very next day with this:

I said Adler best symbolised these summitteers — these 1000 Leftists, rent-seekers, courtiers, string-pullers, patsies and token tame conservatives — but maybe that honour should instead go to fellow delegate Elena Jeffreys, head of the Scarlet Alliance. That’s right: Jeffreys is the head of a collective of prostitutes, and chosen to advise Rudd on ‘future prosperity.’ No satirist could put it better. The list of the summitteers showed precisely how well Rudd has rigged his summit for an orgy, not ideas.¹⁶

The Federal Opposition leader, Brendon Nelson, attacked the credibility of Kevin Rudd’s participant selection by undermining the importance of my role at the Summit, saying ‘I met the representative of the sex workers ... but it was much more difficult to find small business men and women and the Australian Medical Association.’¹⁷ For starters, I am a small business person, as are many sex workers. And it’s unfortunate that Brendon Nelson wasn’t advised by his staff of the central role sex workers have played in the national response to HIV. Scarlet Alliance and our member organisations’ efforts in health education, advocacy and community development have had a significant impact on the health of Australian sex workers, and therefore of their clients and the wider community. Our practical, grassroots experience in health promotion and prevention was of particular importance at the 2020 Summit. There was no one in Australia better placed to bring concrete social issues impacting upon a particular constituency.

Some of the media attention following the Summit engaged with the issue of migrant sex worker rights by lampooning it. The issue of *skilled visas* for migrant sex workers, an idea extrapolated from an interview with Radio National¹⁸ received comprehensive media attention from commercial radio news (NSW Vega and Nova, 29 April) to syndicated South African news

¹⁵ Bolt Andrew ‘Hookers Rep Scores With Rudd’ *Herald Sun*, 8 April 2008 [http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/andrewbolt/index.php/heraldsun/comments/hookers_rep_scores_with_rudd/ viewed 19 May 2008]

¹⁶ Bolt Andrew ‘Moses Scales Summit’ *Herald Sun*, 9 April 2008 [http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/andrewbolt/index.php/heraldsun/comments/column_moses_rudd_scales_summit/P20/ viewed 19 May 2008]

¹⁷ Franklin Mathew, Nelson warns of PC future under Labor rule, *The Australian*, 21 April 2008 pg 6

¹⁸ ‘Sex Group Wants Prostitutes On Skilled Visa List’ *ABC Online*, 30 April 2008 [http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/04/29/2230240.htm?section=Australia viewed 19 May 2008]

outlets¹⁹ and more. Scarlet Alliance has never called for a skilled visa, but this didn't prevent it becoming headline news internationally. Our proposal for a more human rights based approach to accessibility of visas for sex workers is old news, proposed in public submissions to Government for a decade. However the notion of *skilled* visas for sex workers was too titillating to resist and the headlines attempting to ridicule our cause just kept on coming.

However sex worker rights are far from a joke. A short review of the epidemiology of HIV in Australia compared to other countries is evidence of the importance and centrality of sex worker rights to public health outcomes. HIV, while devastating other countries, has been successfully halted in Australia by sex worker's community based peer education model. There has never been a documented case of HIV transmission within the Australian sex industry. From an estimated 160,000 client visits a week in NSW alone not a single case of HIV transmission has occurred. All other sectors of the community are experiencing rises in HIV, but the sex industry isn't. Sex worker rights in Australia include an HIV prevention program that is framed within a workplace context.²⁰ The outcomes for HIV prevention in Australia are tangible and Australian sex worker communities are confident that resourcing sex worker's trafficking prevention efforts will also result in tangible outcomes.

Trafficking prevention measures have informally been utilised within migrant sex worker communities for decades in Australia. Migrant sex worker rights have been a key feature of national approaches to sex worker resources and community development, beginning with the production of the acclaimed "SIREN" resources kit in the early 90's, which brought together the real stories of migrant sex workers, and the outcomes of research into a suite of resources in key languages, accompanied by a kit for service providers. This has since been complemented by comprehensive networking among peer educators, ongoing research and skills exchanges with sex worker groups in the region, extensive submissions into Government trafficking policy and ongoing support for migrant sex workers in Australia by sex worker organisations, projects and services. The practical camaraderie and mentoring that migrant sex workers share amongst themselves has quantifiable benefits for sex worker communities. At the 2020 Summit I raised an example of this within the China workshop of the 'Security and Future Prosperity' stream.

1.1 'The Rise of China' Workshop

While the facilitators collated the results of the morning's workshop outcomes on the first day, we were streamed into thematic workshops, including one entitled 'The Rise of China'. After a comprehensive presentation and questions to the presenter, the discussion turned to the role of China in the Pacific, among our nearest neighbours. China has been approaching Pacific country Governments with aid money, but unlike aid money from western countries, aid money from China is not tied to good governance or democratic outcomes. This was being discussed as a negative. I stood up and spoke about our research with Chinese sex workers in Australia and the anecdotal information from East Timor, Papua New Guinea and Fiji in relation to the presence

¹⁹ 'Only Those Good In The Sack Need Apply' *Pretoria News*, 30 April 2008 [<http://www.pretorianews.co.za/?fSectionId=&fArticleId=vn20080430054401746C211731> viewed 19 May 2008]

²⁰ Fawkes Janelle 'Sex in the workplace = Sex as Work' *ProVision* Ed 1 2006, pgs 11-13

of Chinese sex workers: “Chinese sex workers have raised the bar in the Pacific for sex worker health and safety standards, including condom use. This practical and important skills exchange contributes to workplace conditions for local sex workers. We can deliver aid to the Pacific and tell sex workers to use condoms, however Chinese people are actually in local business partnership and cultural exchange with people in the Pacific and showing local sex workers how to implement condom use — therefore their influence is beyond aid, it’s practical as well, which is a relationship that Australia as a developed country doesn’t have in the Pacific. Australia can’t compete with China in that sense.” This raised a few rumbles but didn’t get any specific response, however for the rest of the discussion when people mentioned industries and China’s influence, a few times ‘sex workers’ were included in people’s statements, with nods to where I was sitting. After this workshop, I was approached by Andrew MacIntyre, Director of the Crawford School of Economics and Government, ANU, who appreciated my input, and then praised our presence again on the main plenary stage later in the day.

1.2 Labour Migration and Cultural Exchange Sub-group

Within the first day we were asked to split off into thematic sub-groups within the Security and Prosperity stream. I participated in the labour migration and cultural exchange theme, which was full of amazing and energetic women — Dimity Fifer, CEO of Australian Volunteers International, Sharon Burrows, President of the Australian Council for Trade Unions, Geraldine Doogue, long time reporter with the ABC, and Tamerlaine Beasley, Managing Director of Beasley Intercultural. The theme group had been directed by the facilitators to focus on the Pacific. We spoke in detail about two key themes — the importance of closer labour and economic ties with the countries of the South Pacific including East Timor, and improved links between community organisations from the Pacific to community organisations in Australia (sometimes called ‘twinning’).

On the topic of labour migration and economic ties, we discussed the specifics of different labour programs in other countries, particularly the example of remittance support in France. This includes tax free income for migrants when it is paid directly into specified community projects in their home country. “Remittance” refers to the money that migrant labourers send home. As this and other specific labour were programs discussed, I used examples from sex worker communities about strong points or possible problems of different models. I emphasised the need for a human rights approach to labour mobility — less about specifics and more about the framework. We tried to think about what the framework of the relationship between Australia and our South Pacific neighbours would be in 2020, and concluded that by then we should be in a South Pacific Economic Community, with totally open labour migration, economic relationships and democratic structures similar to the European Union. This model solved human rights issues of exclusion and discrimination — if citizens of South Pacific countries have the same labour rights in Australia as Australian citizens, then Pacific workers in Australia wouldn’t need special labour — they would receive equal labour rights. Everyone in the group agreed.

The theme of Australian volunteer aid programs and cultural exchange in the Pacific was more controversial. There were many different opinions about the stability and accountability of

Pacific Island governments. Participants in the group also had different opinions and experiences of the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) program. Currently the AYAD program is intended to be an assistance program to community organisations in developing countries. The approach is that individuals from Australia visit another country and ‘help’ delivery aid programs. Everyone in the group acknowledged that many of the community organisations in developing countries don’t need ‘help’ from Australian volunteers — and the Australian volunteers don’t always have a lot to offer, particularly as almost all AYAD volunteers don’t speak the local language, and have no way of communicating to the local people. However we all agreed that Australians benefit from visiting other countries and getting to know more about our regional neighbours. For example, Thai sex worker organisation Empower Foundation is currently hosting two AYAD volunteers from Scarlet Alliance. Empower is more experienced than Scarlet Alliance in some fields; anti-trafficking raids have a longer history in Northern Thailand than in Australia, which means that the Scarlet Alliance volunteers will bring back new skills and insights as a result of their time with Empower. However the AYAD program doesn’t recognise or quantify this exchange — rather the focus is on Australians ‘helping’ our neighbours. Our theme group ran out of time and could not totally agree on how to improve volunteer aid programs in Australia. This was a shame, because the experience of the people in the group would have resulted in some fantastic ideas and concrete proposals. The AYAD program was addressed as needing ‘improvement’, but we didn’t get to the specifics.

We did agree that community organisations in Australia would benefit from developing closer ties with community organisations from Pacific countries. For example, disability organisations having exchanges, sporting associations, business associations etc. Currently Scarlet Alliance is engaged in capacity development ‘twinning’ with sex worker groups in PNG through AusAID funding. But in the group we were talking about something different — at the moment these aid programs — again — were developed with the notion that Australian organisations will ‘help’ Pacific Island communities. The theme group spoke instead of Australians and Pacific Island community groups meeting and exchanging skills and knowledge for the benefit of BOTH groups. This different approach to aid was discussed at length and some specific wording was written onto our ‘butchers’ white paper.

1.3 The Gender Sub-group

I also participated in a theme group concerned with gender met for the purpose of making some specific recommendations. Other participants included Felicity Hill, International Vice President, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Susan Brennan, World President of the Young Women’s Christian Association, Robyn Slarke, Grassroots work Meri in PNG and other Pacific Islands, Fiona McLeod SC, President, Australian Women Lawyers. This group spoke about human rights, CEDAW, the need for there to be a Minister for Women, and about aid funding restrictions. I explained that for human rights, and in particular CEDAW, to be inclusive of sex work, it was vital to recognise that sex work is work. It was agreed, and this was put into the final wording of the gender document. Under the Howard Government aid funding was limited to groups that did not support abortion (this policy was a result of a deal that Tasmanian

Senator Brian Harradine did over the sale of Telstra). I proposed that the funding restriction be lifted, this was agreed to and put into the gender document. UN resolution 1325 was discussed and included in the wording — this is in relation to the particular impact of war and conflict on women.

The issue of gender based violence was discussed, and addressing ‘rape’ was proposed to be included in the final wording of the document. I explained that sexual assault against sex workers is generally perpetrated by police, so as such it is state violence, often taking the form of rape. As such, access to human rights and recourse to justice for all women was necessary to prevent rape — just talking about ‘rape’ in isolation was a short-sighted approach to the issue. Rape is an outcome of other problems, and those other problems must be acknowledge and addressed in order for rape to really be stopped. Every woman in the group agreed, however it was argued that in order to gain ‘sympathy’ for womens’ issues, using rape as a topic to get people’s attention was a strategy. While it was not the intention of the group to undermine the strength and resilience of women in developing countries, we didn’t have the time to discuss the issue fully. Women in developing countries may not appreciate being portrayed as ‘rape victims’ in order to have their rights realised. Using catchphrases of victim hood as pointers towards an issue is a double edged sword — I think it undermines the extensive and complex feminist organising that is already taking place in these countries. If our national policy to international development characterises women in developing countries as merely ‘rape victims,’ instead of understanding that they are the heroes who will eliminate gender based violence if empowered to do so, then we condemn our aid program to be short term and perpetuating of women as victims. The workshop was incredibly thought provoking, and highlighted the lack of allocated space for discussion of gender issues.

All of the outcomes from day 1 were communicated to the Prime Minister and his advisors, and came back to us on day 2 with feedback towards the final document. Unfortunately the proposal of a Pacific Economic Community was knocked back by the advisors from Melbourne University, and we were told to reformulate our ideas. A group including Padraig Crumlin, MUA, Angela Ha, Youth Summit Ambassador, Antonia Kaucz, Hassall and Associates, Louisa Minney, Manager, International Programs and Policy, National Centre in HIV Social Research, Susan Brennan, Dimity Fifer, Sharon Burrows, Tamerlaine Beasley, Andrew MacIntyre, Peter Cosgrove and others, frantically met to discuss and finalise the wording for the labour migration, economic integration and cultural exchange with the Pacific. As the topic suggests, we split into three smaller groups, and had a very short period of time to come up with key ideas we could all agree upon. I was in the labour migration group. Many ideas were discussed, and some specific labour migration programs were lobbied for in those final moments. As the discussion went on, I raised the importance of our final wording being broad enough to include sex worker labour migration. Others in the group also repeatedly raised this point. This was fantastic — our message about a human rights approach to labour mobility had been understood. This was reinforced to me as the day went on — people I had had short conversations with over the previous day were now coming back up to me to ask more questions about migrant sex worker rights. 2020 participants had considered the issues I had raised, and wanted to find out more.

The phrase “human rights based labour migration program” in the Pacific and East Timor was included in the final report. The discussions of the cultural exchange aid program included HIV, education and gender issues, encompassed with reference to the Millennium Development Goals. The group discussing closer economic ties in the region decided to focus on Melanesian states to begin with. These concrete outcomes were shaped by all the amazing individuals involved, and the diverse and active communities we all came from, including the sex worker community of Australia, our region and the world.

Trafficking in the sex industry is a labour issue and must take into account the income generation intentions that migrant sex workers have when they plan their international travel. Trafficking prevention — access to visas, arming migrant workers with accurate information about their labour rights, peer based support mechanisms in both home countries and destination countries — is about making migration, and income generation, safer. Safe migration and trafficking prevention should take priority over anti-trafficking measures that prioritise investigations and prosecutions. Every trafficking case is an indicator of failed opportunities for prevention. Programs that aim to stop women from being able to migrate, work in the sex industry or access clients and income risk exclude working women from the protections they deserve. Alliance set about bringing this internationalist perspective to the ‘Security and Prosperity’ stream of the 2020 Summit in April 2008, with considerable success. The complex impacts of HIV have been mitigated by the Australian sex worker response, which is based on community engagement, peer education, health promotion, community development, harm reduction, and centres around sex workers rights. We have the ability to contribute greatly to a prevention approach to the similarly complex issue of trafficking. ●

