



# Only Rights Can Stop the Wrongs

## GLOBAL STATEMENT

### INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST SEX WORKERS

**Today marks the 13<sup>th</sup> annual International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. For thirteen years, sex workers have used this day to highlight the need for action to end violence against sex workers.**

The issues faced by sex workers vary from region to region. These differences are due to different laws, social and cultural contexts, but one common issue faced by all sex workers is their vulnerability to and experience of violence.

This global statement draws attention to the fact that all sex workers are vulnerable to violence because of the criminalisation and legal oppression of sex work, stigma, and discrimination. This vulnerability to violence is increased for sex workers living with HIV, sex workers who use drugs, transgender sex workers, migrant sex workers, and sex workers that are part of other marginalised groups.

Sex workers are not accepted by society, which makes their work environment vulnerable to various threats of violence. Female, male and transgender sex workers are exposed to violence everyday and their human rights are violated. Police and law enforcement officials<sup>1</sup>, detention centers<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> "Another Red-Light Area Closes in Indonesia," NSWP, 28 March 2016 accessed 12 December 2016 at <http://www.nswp.org/news/another-red-light-area-closes-indonesia> and "121 Sex Workers Detained during Nataree Brothel Raid in Bangkok," NSWP, 12 July 2016 accessed 12 December 2016 at <http://www.nswp.org/news/121-sex-workers-detained-during-nataree-brothel-raid-bangkok>.

<sup>2</sup> "Violence Against Sex Workers at Apollo Police Station in Lima, Peru" NSWP, 20 April 2016 accessed 12 December 2016 <http://www.nswp.org/news/violence-against-sex-workers-the-apollo-police-station-lima-peru>.



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members of the public<sup>3</sup>, health care professionals<sup>4</sup>, and programme implementers<sup>5</sup> violate their human rights every day. Sex workers also experience violence from members of their communities and their families.<sup>6</sup>

Police rarely take violence against sex workers seriously. The criminalisation of sex work makes it very difficult for sex workers to report abuse to the police when it occurs, and to have that abuse taken seriously when they do.

It is not only police who do not take violence against sex workers seriously. Politicians, legislators, authorities, academics, and some United Nations entities also disregard the needs of sex workers.

NSWP recently launched the #AreWeNotWomen campaign to highlight how some members of the women's movement, including UN Women, are silencing and excluding sex workers in the development of sex work policy. It will not be possible for UN Women to develop a credible human rights based policy on sex work if they do not recognise and respect the diverse realities and lived experiences of all sex workers. If UN Women adopts a policy that is not rights-based, it will have dangerous consequences for sex workers.

"There is a wave of violence here," said Karina Bravo from La Plataforma Latinoamericana de Personas que Ejercen el Trabajo Sexual (PLAPERTS) in Latin America. "Femicide against sex workers, especially trans sex workers, is very high in Latin America and states do not provide comprehensive strategies to reduce or eradicate violence against women, including sex workers and trans women."

"December 17th resonates with the African sex worker movement since it is a time to highlight the injustices that sex workers living and working in Africa

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<sup>3</sup> "Russian Sex Workers Violated during Illegal Brothel Raids," NSWP, 18 May 2016 accessed 12 December 2016 at <http://www.nswp.org/news/russian-sex-workers-violated-during-illegal-brothel-raids>

<sup>4</sup> UNDP, 2015, The Right(s) Evidence: Sex Work, Violence and HIV in Asia available at <http://www.nswp.org/news/violence-health-care-and-custodial-settings-major-contributor-sex-workers-vulnerability-hiv> (last accessed 8 December 2015).

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organisation, 2013, Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers: Practical Approaches from Collaborative Interventions available at <http://www.nswp.org/resource/who-implementing-comprehensive-hivsti-programmes-sex-workers-practical-approaches-collabora> (last accessed 12 December, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



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face. This year, we pay particular attention to worrying trends that seek to re-criminalise sex work in countries such as Tanzania. We also note positive developments in repealing punitive laws on loitering in countries such as Zimbabwe. We are hopeful that our efforts will bear fruit improving the lives of African sex workers," said Daughtie Ogutu from the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA).

"Sex workers across Asia and the Pacific continued to face multiple forms of violence in 2016. Even as we see progress in some areas, there are steps backward in others. Condoms as evidence, arrests, and deportations of migrant sex workers continue unabated as governments and policy-makers focus on immigration and trafficking rather than sex workers rights. Our workplaces continue to be raided, our rights continue to be ignored, and in many countries violence against us is compounded with the impunity that criminalisation of sex work brings," said Kaythi Win from the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW).

This 17 December, "ICRSE mourns and remembers our colleagues who have been murdered because of being sex workers, women, trans, or migrants. ICRSE is calling for an end to violence against all sex workers and has been developing resources such as 'Underserved. Overpoliced, Invisibilised. LGBT Sex Workers do Matter' or 'Surveilled. Exploited. Deported. Rights Violations against Migrant Sex Workers in Europe and Central Asia' to raise awareness of the intersection of oppressions and vulnerabilities faced by the majority sex workers in our region," said Luca Stevenson, coordinator of the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe.

"In Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, deeply entrenched stigma coupled with criminalisation fuels high levels of violence against sex workers, especially if they are women, queer, trans, Roma, using drugs or living with HIV. Police and other state actors are the main perpetrators acting with impunity, often colluding with other non-state actors and most often ignoring sex workers' attempts to respond, for instance by reporting violence. 17<sup>th</sup> of December is a day when sex workers communities across the region gather together, grieve, build strategies of resistance. Sex workers' demands should be heard throughout the whole year," said Stasa from the Sex Workers' Advocacy Network for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SWAN).

"The violence, stigma and discrimination that sex workers in the Caribbean continue to encounter on a daily basis is alarming. As we work together, let us

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not forget that sex workers are human beings, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers to name a few. Our lives matter too,” said Miriam Edwards from the Caribbean Sex Work Coalition.

NSWP demands the following actions be taken to ensure the rights of sex workers are respected:

- An end to the criminalisation and legal oppression of sex workers, clients, and third parties<sup>7</sup>;
- Equal protection from law enforcement and the criminal justice systems;
- An end to condoms being used as evidence of sex work;
- Equal access to rights-based health and social services for sex workers, including sexual and reproductive health;

For more information about the demands of sex worker, please read the NSWP [Consensus Statement](#).

For a global list of 17 December events, please click [here](#).

This is a joint statement from the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA), Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), Sex Workers’ Advocacy Network for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SWAN), International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE), and La Plataforma Latinoamericana de Personas que Ejercen el Trabajo Sexual (PLAPERTS). Where no regional network exists, the statement has received the support of sub-regional and national networks.



<sup>7</sup> The term ‘third parties’ includes managers, brothel keepers, receptionists, maids, drivers, landlords, hotels who rent rooms to sex workers and anyone else who is seen as facilitating sex work.