

Notes on Sex-Worker Reception and Discussions at AIDS 2000 Conference

1. **Shane Hart-Petzer:** Opened the meeting and we had a welcome from Carltonville women...

In Africa Sex workers still seen as transmitters, although there is no evidence of this (of course), and there are issues of violence and access to condoms and violence against workers, which are much more relevant to workers lives.

In Gauteng (Carltonville) sex workers are the safest women to have sex with, but get beaten and need real opportunities for empowerment.

In Mexico there are only 150 small NGO's and this conference and gathering have been great for solidarity. We need more studies and action around human rights and these issues. The conference and meeting have been good/useful personally and I don't feel alone.

2. **Hanna:** Spoke about Shane's hard work and moved a vote a thanks which was accepted etc. and gave him a bottle of nice local wine (which a few of us downed later.)
3. **Latin American Doctor from Uruguay:** Women sex workers have tradeunions fighting for rights and... We have only one HIV+ sex worker in 300 participants in our study/program... (Procedural: we have a commitment to participation and solidarity in practice which includes translation and what it entails — even if the Conference doesn't so we will wait patiently on translation when required from whichever language) ...Our transvestite study shows only a 20% — but they are not fully organised, although they all realize they need solidarity. Invite us (progressive doctors/loyal supporters) to be part of their and your fight. It is important that we help each other. ...In 2003 you are invited warmly to our Uruguayan STD conference and to come and help organise the conference. Also in 2001 you are invited to Mexico for the Latin American meeting about STDs to help make it a success.
4. **Heidi-Jo:** wanted to remind us that we now don't have the energy any more to challenge the shit research on sex work that is still coming up after all these conferences in which we have participated to the best of our ability and fought the lies and inconsistencies from the floor, always — and behind the scenes on committees when possible.

She proposed two proposals for action:

- a. That we nurture the next generation of sex worker rights' activists; that we bring them into responsible positions in all our organisations and networks: That we move them beyond peer educators and train, guide and elevate them from peer educators at a local level right through to responsible, trained, educated and empowered activists suitable to represent sex workers rights at international conferences and other international fora.
- b. That we make use of the of existing resources within the NSWP such as email list and other forms of contact to caucus ahead of time so as to

organise ourselves for conferences and to organise other specific interventions as required. (PROCEDURAL: Lots of head nodding, yes's, si's and mmm, good idea's to both proposals both singly and co-jointly.)

Jo finished by noting that by the third day our solidarity got us to challenge things again — both from the floor and as much as possible from official conference positions such as session chairpersons etc.

5. **Camille Cabral, Paris:**

- a. Transgender issues specifically need to be addressed during the organising of the conference. The conditions were appalling and the conference organisers must take this into account.
- b. Language: Elvira and I had trouble at many sessions, especially the scientific sessions. Impossible to submit many abstracts in English from French and Spanish speaking countries. Barcelona secretariat must be spoken to about this.
- c. The reality of transgender sex workers must be represented in sessions and presented.

6. **Wolfgang, Germany:** Put a proposal to split into male and female sex worker tracks and sessions. In favour of this he said that young males don't describe themselves as sex workers; that they have other, different issues such as being homeless, poor, undereducated, exploited, in danger of violence, coming out and other sexuality issues. This he said was why they should be treated separately and distinctly.

In Response:

- a. **Lea, Australia:** The issues he said that separated the male workers from the female workers are false, that what he is describing were issues of youth sex work and homelessness, so they should not be separated.)
- b. a male sex worker also opposed the proposal as women workers too have many and varied issues.

7. **Cheryl Overs:** Said some important thank-yous

- a. to Andrew Sorfleet for continuing to do the NSWP website.
- b. Danny Cockerline was especially remembered for all the work he had put into sex workers rights, and for being one of our main inspirations as an activist.
- c. Shane Hart-Petzer for taking on the Network stuff and doing the NSWP co-ordination job.

- d. Andrew Hunter for bothering to right these notes down and for many years work.
- e. Alex who is now here and fully involved in the Network from Eastern Europe.

Also Cheryl pointed out in response to Wolfgang that the continued solidarity and the strong working relationship between male and female sex workers has made the network stronger and more dynamic, and that we need to work together, not separately.

- 8. **Sue Metzentrath, Australia:** Gave some concrete examples of international organising from Asia/Pacific perspective. They have advocated for representation on conference organising committees, and have representation on the next Asia Pacific HIV conference in Melbourne. Doing lots of other things including:
 - a. Helping people to write English language abstracts and other academic issues so that proposals from sex workers get accepted.
 - b. Helping to write scholarship applications
 - c. Organising a sex work culture festival in Melbourne.

- 9. **Porn and Noi, Empower, Thailand:** Happy to be here at the conference and meeting. In Thailand in November holding a sex workers festival also.

Porn: "Empower is the only group to help Women in sex work in Thailand. When first came to Empower it was small. I'm also sad that many of our friends have died and left fewer working with us from then. I wish all workers and friends in Thailand could be here, so we need to get more of them to the next conference."

- 10. **Peter, Zimbabwe:** "Our president doesn't accept anything. Sex workers are still called prostitutes. Before my job doing safe sex work, especially with gay men, I worked as a street sex worker to support my younger brothers. In many cultures people won't accept things, but I want to network and fight. I don't fear anyone, even Mugabe, but out gay men and sex workers in Zimbabwe are scared. We are welcome and invited to help."
- 11. **Speaker from Netherlands:** We must not forget sex work migrant issues. Sex worker migrants are supposed to have "bad motives." We must give them their rights.
- 12. **Tini-Iklas/Pink Triangle, Malaysia:** In Malaysia Islam is the main religion, and the Civil and religious laws give double oppression. Have never heard this discussed. We need a discussion on sex work and Islam.
- 13. Shane summarised some of the key issues that have come up:
 - a. Language and translation.
 - b. Transgender issues.
 - c. Research and our responses.
 - d. Migrant sex workers.
 - e. Ensuring that we don't just focus on the health issues that everyone are obsessed with — we need to fight the laws.

Thanked Scott for his support in keeping the NSWP secretariat going.

Shane also raised the issue of being better preparation by NSWP to organise things for conferences.

14. **Cheryl Overs responded:** Understands issues and problems, but must take some responsibility as she didn't tell Shane that the NSWP co-ordinator doesn't get invited to sit on committees and give comments/advice etc; they only have the NSWP name to create space to yell and complain about sex worker representation and issues.

Also the NSWP can't be used to distribute things and help funding etc. as there are no resources. It can be used for networking and communicating and is available to help with the process of what we want to happen.

We need to understand that the conference structure is complex. Shane needs to be able to respond to the conference organisers with NSWP members to nominate for committees.

People need to volunteer for abstract committees, organising committees and scholarship committees among many.

The scholarships at this conference were a scandal — a lot more people should be here.

We need to self invite ourselves into the conference structure — because they are too scared to say no — but they prefer if we don't ask.

Discussion closed.