



## **The Swedish Women's Lobby written statement for the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), declares that States must take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women (Article 6). Even so, and despite the increasing understanding and agreement that trafficking and prostitution seriously violate women's human rights, the purchase of human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation is still not prohibited in all countries.

Prostitution and trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a severe form of men's violence against women and an international crime of increasing global magnitude. Any society that claims to defend principles of gender equality and women's human rights must oppose that women's and girls' bodies are commodities that can be bought and sold. The prevalence of prostitution is an obstacle to equality between women and men. Furthermore, it is our strong conviction that when adopting the perspective of equality and human rights it is not possible, nor relevant, to make a distinction between voluntary and non-voluntary prostitution.

In order to prevent and combat the purchase of sexual services and trafficking, Governments need to address the demand. The most effective way of doing so is by criminalizing the purchaser of, and not the person who sell sexual services. Such a shift addresses the root cause of the exploitation which is the demand, and not the person being exploited.

On 1 January 1999, Sweden became the first country in the world to introduce a legislation criminalizing the purchase, but not the sale, of sexual services. The legislation stated that it is unacceptable that men, in a gender equal society, obtain casual sexual relations with women in return for payment. By introducing a ban on purchasing sexual services Sweden also sent an important signal to other countries highlighting our view on purchasing sexual services and prostitution. The law points out that prostitution causes serious harm to individuals as well as to society. Sweden's 1999 sex purchase law was the first law to define prostitution as a form of male violence against women. Since then, the Swedish legislation is regularly referred to as a model to end prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The evaluation of the Swedish sex purchase law clearly demonstrates that the law has had positive effects. Since the law was introduced, street prostitution in Sweden has been halved. When the Swedish sex purchase law was introduced, its critics argued that that it would drive prostitution underground and that it would increase the risk for physical abuse of women in prostitution. The evaluation found no proof that this is the case in Sweden. There is also evidence that the extent of prostitution on the internet is much lower in Sweden than in other countries.

The evaluation also states that the sex purchase law has reduced the extent of trafficking. Evidence shows that ban on the purchase of sexual services has counteracted the establishment of organized crime. According to the National Criminal Police, it is clear that the sex purchase law acts as a barrier to human traffickers and procurers considering establishing in Sweden.

Furthermore, women who have left prostitution refer to the law as helpful in giving them the strength to leave, and to stop stigmatizing and blaming themselves and instead put the blame on the male purchasers. Thus, the law has been a concrete tool in both decreasing the demand from purchasers, and in helping women to leave prostitution.

Above all, the evaluation shows that the demand for sexual services has been reduced and that the law has had a normative effect on society. The ban on the purchase of

sexual services was intended as a statement of society's view that it should not be possible to buy a human being, and the evaluation shows that this has been the case. Sweden has experienced an increased public support for the ban, and the support is greatest among young people.

Sweden have now had the legislation for 13 years and it is time to take the next step forward and further strengthen the sex purchase law. In order to do so, the Swedish Women's Lobby wants to put focus on how the law can be further strengthened and how Governments, private actors and NGOs can collaborate in the fight against sex purchase and sex tourism.

When Swedes travel abroad, for business or pleasure, sex purchase is not illegal as long as it is not criminalized in the visited country. The legislation needs to be consistent and clear on that sex purchase and trafficking is not allowed neither in the own country, nor abroad. It is time for Sweden and other countries to follow the example of the Norwegian legislation, entered into force January 1st 2009, and expand the law to also include sex purchase abroad. Policies should be formed on the basis of human rights and equality between women and men regardless of the place of the crime. Such a legislation better allows for addressing the growing problem of sex tourism.

The Swedish Women's Lobby wants to see that the implementation of the current legislation is prioritized and kept on the political agenda with resources and education of police, justice and social workers. Furthermore, it is important to involve the private sector of companies and travel agencies to take action against sex trade by introducing policies and code of conducts against sex purchase for employees.

In order to make certain that the violations of women's human rights are put to an end, the trade of women's bodies needs to be prohibited all over the world. The Swedish Women's Lobby and its members organizations urges States Governments and the United Nations to prevent, combat and eliminate prostitution and trafficking in women and girls by:

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- *Taking a clear and explicit standpoint on that prostitution and sexual exploitation of women is a violation of human rights through implementation of the legislations and conventions that already exists.* States shall conclude international agreements to address the problem of trafficking in women for prostitution, and live up to the international conventions and commitments already made such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.
- *Prioritizing the prevention of prostitution and sex trafficking through criminalization of sex purchase.* States shall adopt or strengthen legislative and other measures to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of sexual exploitation of women and girls. States shall also put in place information campaigns to spread information on sex purchase as a violation of human rights.
- *Preventing trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation by combating the male demand.* In order to combat the demand, efforts must be directed towards young men and boys by working with masculinity, gender perspectives, norm critique and gender equality at early ages e.g. through the educational systems and sports associations.
- *Collaborating with private actors and NGOs in the fight against sex purchase and sex tourism.* For the legislation to be consistent and clear, it is important to encourage the private sector to take action. For instance by introducing policies and code of conducts against sex purchase, and by including women's rights in their engagement in corporate social responsibility (CSR).
- *Ensuring continued and sustained social work to support girls and women at risk of ending up in prostitution, as well as to support girls and women to leave prostitution.* States and NGOs need to work together to provide support services and measures for safe returning for women who have been victims of trafficking. Although focus on the purchaser is critical for preventing prostitution and sex trafficking, it is also important for professional groups to offer help and support to girls and women in prostitution.