

Att: Michel Sidibé, Executive Director, UNAIDS

With copy to:

Helen Clark, Administrator, UNDP

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UNFPA

H.E. Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women

Respect CEDAW - suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women

The Swedish Women's Lobby has with great concern observed the recommendations given by UNAIDS on the so called decriminalisation of "sex work", instead of criminalisation of sex purchase. UNAIDS recommendations are in direct opposition to international human rights standards, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, where all convention states commit themselves to "suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women." Furthermore, UNAIDS also ignore the experiences of survivors of prostitution and the knowledge of the link between legalisation of sex purchase and increased sex trafficking.

The Swedish (or Nordic) model on prostitution addresses demand by decriminalizing the person in prostitution and criminalizing the buyers and pimps. This approach recognizes the inherent inequality in the power dynamic between the buyer and the person bought in a commercial sex transaction. The effectiveness of combating sex trafficking through addressing demand for commercial sex has been affirmed by the UN Trafficking Protocol, the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the former head of UN Women, yet the two reports at issue call for laws that address the demand for commercial sex to be repealed.

There is mounting evidence that legalization of sex purchase does not protect people in prostitution. It does not decrease trafficking, nor does it prevent spreading of HIV and aids. The Swedish experience show that criminalisation of sex purchase in fact changes the mind-set of men, and it changes their activities.

The evaluation of the Swedish sex purchase law clearly demonstrates its positive effects. Street prostitution in Sweden has been halved, prostitution has not gone underground, and physical abuse of women in prostitution has not increased. We have evidence that the extent of prostitution on the internet is much lower in Sweden than in other countries.

Most important, 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 helping them to leave prostitution. They do not blame themselves; instead they put the blame on the male purchasers.

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.

UNAIDS recommendation to revise and narrow the definition of trafficking in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (UN Trafficking Protocol), is solely a way to withdraw the rights of victims of trafficking to be recognized as such.

Statistics show that the majority of cases of HIV and aids in Sweden are immigrants from especially Africa and Asia who emigrate from countries where prostitution is widespread and sex purchase is allowed and part of common masculinity. A new global agreement on understanding sex purchase as trade in human beings, and the support for those who suffer from the effects of prostitution should indeed be an effective means to stop the spreading of HIV and aids.

The Swedish Women's Lobby urge that UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNDP clarify their positions on the grounded links between sex purchase, trafficking and spreading of HIV/aids.

Yours sincerely,



Gertrud Åström, president, the Swedish Women's Lobby