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OPEN LETTER TO UN WOMEN

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DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LAKSHMI PURI AND

DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOHN HENDRA

UN Women's note on "sex work" harms women and impedes the struggle against prostitution

We were surprised and deeply disappointed to read *UN Women's note on sex work, sexual exploitation and trafficking* from October 9, 2013. And we are not reassured by your declaration that it's not an official statement, only a "technical clarification". It still reveals your views on prostitution. The question we are left with is: what do you ground your statements on?

When UN Women declares that it is important that we "*recognize the right of all sex workers to choose their work*" you show a complete lack of understanding of the condition of women in prostitution.

For example, the German Government's evaluation of its law on prostitution as "work" showed that after five years only **1%** (one percent) of the women in prostitution had employment contracts. They didn't want it. When asked why, the majority of the women answered that they saw prostitution only as a **temporary solution** to an impossible (financial) situation, and as something they wanted to get away from.¹

UN Women shows the same lack of understanding of prostitution as a phenomenon, when you state that you want to "*ensure safety in and through the workplace*" in order to make prostitution "*free from exploitation, violence and coercion*".

This displays that UN Women fails to understand that prostitution **in itself** is *exploitation, violence and coercion* against the ones being bought, primarily women. The prerequisite of prostitution is the expectation that the one getting prostituted *does not want to have sex*. The buyer pays to turn a no into a yes – at the expense of human rights and equality. The prostitution perpetrator is forcing his own sexuality onto somebody else, but buys himself "free" of responsibility.

And no matter what the laws say, no matter if it takes place indoors or outdoors, prostitution everywhere is dangerous and harmful to women.² **Violence being an integral part of prostitution** should be enough in itself to make UN Women understand prostitution as unacceptable.

UN Women also claims that human trafficking/sexual exploitation are human rights violations, while "sex work" is not. But all kinds of prostitution have the same basis, as we've explained here above. That is why it's not surprising that in countries where prostitution is legalized, illegal prostitution and trafficking increase.³ They all link together, as they are part of the same phenomenon.

Also, all forms of prostitution have the same effects on *society's view of women*. How can we struggle for a society where women and men are equal, if at the same time men have the legal right to buy sexual access to women's bodies? How can we fight against sexual harassment in workplaces, if the very same actions that the society define as sexual harassment and abuse, occasionally should be seen as a "job"?

Prostitution is a human rights violation and there should be no compromise in efforts to address it. We expect the UN and its subsidiary organs to act against all kinds of oppression; racism, imperialism, class and gender oppression. All these kinds of oppression come together in prostitution.

Therefore we strongly urge UN Women to consider what happens to ***women's human rights*** in societies where women can be bought for sexual purposes.

We also wish you will read the Swedish Government's evaluation of the law against the prostitution perpetrators, the buyers. Your political statement in the note differ from the results in the Swedish evaluation as well as from what police, social services and the women who have exited prostitution testify there.

And finally we sincerely urge you to read our booklet "***Speaking of prostitution***", where we have gathered arguments for and against prostitution.

www.kvinnofronten.nu/eng/speaking-of-prostitution.htm

Sweden in October, 2013

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The Women's front in Sweden

1. Report by the Federal Government on the Impact of the Act Regulating the Legal Situation of Prostitutes (Prostitution Act) by Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2007.
2. Study on National Legalisation on Prostitution and the Trafficking in Women and Children. The EU Parliament/Transcrime, 2005.
3. Legalizing Prostitution is not the Answer, The example of Victoria, Australia, by Mary Sullivan and Sheila Jeffreys, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, CATW, 2001, and The Legalization of Prostitution: Myth and Reality, A Comparative Study of Four Countries, by Nomi Levenkron, Hotline for Migrant Workers, Israel 2007, and Swedish government report SOU 2010:49 The Ban against the Purchase of Sexual Services. An evaluation 1999 - 2008.