

Sex Workers' Rights Statement from the International Seminar of Sex Workers in Asia and Pacific – Bangkok, Thailand, November 15-19, 2000

Dear friends:

The International Seminar of Sex Workers in Asia and Pacific which was held in Bangkok, Thailand in 15-19 November, 2000 has ended with a great success and full support from our friends all over the world.

We would like to thank our friends, international organizations, NGOs, media, local and international, government agencies, sex workers' communities, supporters – morally and financially, friends and families who have given warm support and encouragement to our important seminar.

The Joint Statement read in Rififi bar, Patpong street, on the evening of Sunday 19th November at the international cultural program to celebrate a closing session, agreed in one voice of the region concluding:

Statement

WE, Sex Workers from Australia, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, USA.

WE, the representatives of the Asia-Pacific Network of Sex-workers, in solidarity and unity, issue the following joint statement in response to issues affecting the sex industry on a national and regional level.

WE came from many different countries and many different backgrounds, but we discovered that we face many of same problems in our work. Our first and most important statement is as follows:

- Prostitution is not a criminal activity. It is an economic issue.
- Prostitution is not a moral issue. It is a social issue.

The present anti-prostitution laws in many of our countries in the Asia/Pacific region criminalize sex workers, discriminate against us and restrict our access to health and other important services. These laws negatively affect the quality of life and well being of all sex workers.

Decriminalisation is identified as the most effective way to ensure the safety and promote the rights of sex workers. With decriminalisation, prostitution will no longer be covered by criminal laws, it will be covered by labour laws, public health policies and child protection laws. Sex workers will then have access to health and welfare services, information and education. Discrimination and stigmatization will be reduced.

In recognition of the fact that sex-workers are:

- a. not the problem but the answer
- b. decision-makers at home, in the community, at work, nationally and regionally
- c. professionals with an income
- d. important contributors to the economy and culture
- e. educators about HIV/AIDS and human rights.

We, as representatives of Asia-Pacific sex worker communities, encourage representatives of the media to:

- a. Challenge the stereotypes of sex-workers
- b. Create an image that does not objectify, criminalise or dehumanise sex-workers.
- c. Support us in speaking for ourselves as experts in our field.
- d. Integrate, not alienate, sex-workers.

We also call on individual countries to address the following immediate and pressing concerns:

- a. To end to all harassment by state authorities in Burma, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Thailand and the USA.
- b. To support cross-border community programmes for Thailand, Burma and Laos.
- c. To provide compensation and welfare for sex workers in Thailand funded from the national profits of the sex-industry.
- d. To recognise the families of sex workers in India and the right to the education of their children.
- e. To guarantee the safety of sex-workers from Burma whose safety is threatened through the deportation process.
- f. To provide human rights training in relation to sex work for authorities, including police and social workers in Hong Kong.
- g. To protect the human rights of migrant sex workers including the right to travel and work legally in Australia.
- h. To ensure comprehensive HIV/AIDS education for sex workers and that preventative measures (e.g. condoms and clean injecting equipment) are available to all sex-workers in Malaysia and Bangladesh.

We, as representatives of Asia-Pacific sex worker communities, call on the Heads of States of the countries in Asia-Pacific to:

- a. Decriminalise sex work
- b. Commit to ensuring that the rights of sex-workers are respected

- c. Improve working conditions through the development of Occupational Health and Safety Standards in the sex industry in consultation with sex workers
- d. Ensure access to holistic health care and social services respecting choice and confidentiality.
- e. Improve access to and/or offer progressive and diverse educational and vocational opportunities

In conclusion, we call on governments, authorities, communities, and the media to join with us in solidarity when we say:

SEX WORK IS WORK.

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