Biography of The Men’s Development Network

The Men’s Development Network (MDN) is a not for profit, developmental consultative organisation based in Waterford City, Ireland, which has promoted gender equality, men’s health, and counselling services since 1997. MDN work locally, nationally and internationally in alliance with women’s groups highlighting the gender based violence including prostitution and sex trafficking which affects women, girls and some men and boys who are effected by the abuse they experience in the sex trade.

As a group MDN work in partnership with The Turn Off The Red Light Campaign (TORL). TORL consists of 73 organisations including, survivors of prostitution and sexual exploitation, policy makers, rape crisis centres and migrant services. We are actively involved in campaigning to introduce legislation pertaining to the current The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015. We are fully involved and committed to the legislative process in Ireland regarding the introduction of the ‘Nordic Model’, which is a human rights and gender equality-based approach to end prostitution and sex trafficking, and work towards gaining commitment from the Department of Justice and Equality to support this change.

Executive Summary

We welcome the opportunity to submit to the inquiry into prostitution in particular, to argue that the balance in the burden of criminality should shift to those who pay for sex rather than those who sell it. The intention to decriminalise the prostituted person and criminalise the payment of sexual services removes the invisibility of the buyer and puts the onus of responsibility on to him/her and acknowledges that prostituted persons are not the perpetrators of harm. The normative message that legislation will send to society must be clear; that it is an offence for any person/s to obtain or pay for sex from a prostituted person over the age of 18 in exchange for payment of money, shelter, drugs or other material goods and that the payment for another human being is an affront to human dignity and contributes to the degradation and the normalization of abuse of all women and girls in society.

Any intention of legislation regarding prostitution must take into consideration a number of points.

1. We would like to acknowledge that men and transgender persons are prostituted in the sex trade but would like to point to the fact that the majority of those who are prostituted and trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation are women and girls and are sold to a male market who demand them (Belser et al 2005).

2. Prostitution is inherently dangerous, damaging and brutal and many of those who are prostituted are groomed, tricked, coerced, deceived, sexually exploited, abused, raped, and left physically and emotionally traumatised. Research in nine countries, found 60-75% of prostituted women were raped; 70-95% experienced physically assault; and 68% suffered Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, at levels similar to combat veterans or victims of state torture (Farley et al 2004).

3. Prostitution causes great psychological and physical harm to women who are involved in the sex trade. Potterat et al (2004) US longitudinal study, found that the causes of death amongst prostitutes include homicide, suicide, drug- and alcohol-related problems, HIV infection and accidents. The death rate among prostitutes 17 times higher than that of the age-matched general female population.

4. For the vast majority of prostituted women, they lack viable alternatives. Poverty, discrimination, homelessness, addiction, social disadvantage, childhood sexual abuse and human trafficking are just
some of the entry routes into prostitution in Ireland (Globalisation, Sex Trafficking and Prostitution in Ireland 2009).

5. Many women who are prostituted face a continuum of sexual exploitation in their life time, including childhood sexual abuse. Regardless of the physical location, indoor or outdoor, violence, abuse and rape are inherent in the sex trade (Farley 2004).

6. The physical, psychological and emotional damage that prostituted persons’ experience comes from the actions of the person or persons, mainly men, who are paying to further exploit women and girls and this is clearly documented in research, UK and Internationally. It is vital that The Crown Prosecution Service's recognise prostitution as violence against women as the system of prostitution is in itself a serious form of men’s violence against women and girls.

7. The sex-trade is a highly organised criminal activity. All victims of sex trafficking are trafficked into prostitution or to the commercial sex industry. It’s impossible to prevent sex trafficking without addressing the commercial sex market, which is both highly criminal and lucrative (Dank et al 2004).

8. The physical, psychological, emotional, cultural and sexual violence that prostituted women experience is mainly perpetrated by the prostitute-users, traffickers and brothel owners. Any fines/and or penalties for procuring, organising prostitution, pimping and brothel keeping should be increased exponentially. It is vital that a person or persons (e.g. the buyer) who solicit or importune another person for the purpose of prostitution must be adequately penalised and any fines and/or penalties must reflect that their actions fuel the demand for sexual exploitation. Again, solidifying this in law will have a normative and declarative effect and will ensure that this prospective piece of legislation sends a clear message to society that paying for sexual services from another human being is violence against women and this is not tolerated, or acceptable as it contributes to abuse of women and girls and impedes women and girl’s full and equal participation in society.

9. As a men’s organisation which seeks to eradicate all forms of men’s violence against women and girls, including those in the sex trade, we are hopeful that that those who are prostituted in society will be protected and supported. We would like to further highlight the need for support services to assist women and men exiting prostitution. Prostitution is not a job that a woman chooses: for the majority of women they enter into prostitution because they have no other options. We must also provide assistance to women who need support to exit prostitution. This point has been articulated time and time again by survivors of prostitution and services that support prostituted women in Ireland and the UK. With this in mind, fines for convictions relating to the buying/payment for sex should be used to fund essential support services as a restorative practice.

10. To make our position clear:

   - Those who are prostituted, regardless of where they are physically situated (indoor or outdoor) must not be subjected to criminal sanctions and must be decriminalised.
   - Those who buy, organise and exploit individuals in the sex trade must be criminalised.
   - Provide supportive services for women who wish to exit prostitution.

The proposal of partial decriminalisation (NORDIC MODEL) of those who sell sex will affirm the existence of human trafficking into prostitution and other abusive aspects of the sex trade. Those who profit from prostitution and those who buy sex, feed the demand for sexual exploitation and must be criminalized as a matter of international law.

11. The Nordic Model is a human rights and gender equality-based approach to end prostitution and sex trafficking and has been introduced in a number of countries, such as Sweden (1998) Finland (2006) Norway (2009) and Iceland (2009). The Nordic Model is under consideration across a range of other
countries, and has been accepted and implemented in Canada recently with the passing of Bill C36 (Government of Canada 2014). More recently, Stormont in Northern Ireland passed Clause 6 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill, which criminalises sex buyers, decriminalises the seller, and provides victim assistance (Northern Ireland Assembly 2014).

Finally, in Ireland the Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald TD has acted upon the overwhelming evidence that organized crime runs Irish prostitution and changes to Irish legislation regarding prostitution are expected after the current election which will be held on the February 26th 2016. This will mean than similar legislation will be in place across the island of Ireland in a bid to combat the sexual exploitation of women and girls in our society. As has been found in countries where this has been implemented, criminalizing the purchaser decreases the demand for paid sex and this is a significant milestone in ending the exploitation of women and children who are exploited in the sex trade which puts hundreds of millions of euros into the pockets of pimps and traffickers.

Yours sincerely,
The Men’s Development Network
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