My name is Andrew Boff and I am a member of the London Assembly with a mandate from the entire Greater London Area. I would like to submit three pieces of evidence to the Home Affairs Committee’s review into Prostitution as these directly relate to the aims of the enquiry.

In the work I had undertaken in compiling “Silence on Violence” in 2012 I was overwhelmed by the evidence that suggested that the more the Police and local authorities sought to eradicate sex work or put obstacles in the way of it, the more it made those people who sold sex vulnerable to attack. The report made recommendations to improve the safety of sex workers.

When enforcement has taken place against the clients to discourage demand, sex workers have then moved to more dangerous environments and further away from the services that are there to help them. This happened in Newham when the local Police closed down 80 massage parlours despite there being no complaints from the public. The result was that there was then a rise in street sex work in the neighbouring Borough of Redbridge.

Since compiling my report I have looked for evidence that supported the Nordic model that is being investigated by the Committee. Instead of evidence I tends to encounter assertions that because there was less data that the model worked. The absence of data is inevitable when there are incentives for the activities to take place hidden from view and one has to ask what other metrics one can use to determine if the model is really working in the interests of vulnerable people.

There is a relative wealth of data, however, from Merseyside, Leeds and other parts if the UK that if one adopts a harm reduction strategy of engagement with sex workers and their clients, there is an improvement in reporting rates which makes violent criminals and traffickers easier to find.

As a result of writing “Silence on Violence” I then published “Shadow City” which tried to analyse more closely what was happening in London with regard to human trafficking. That report concluded that human trafficking was far more complex than just being viewed through the prism of forced prostitution and that sex work was one of many things that trafficked people are forced to do. Effectively banning sex work as a response to rescuing the small number of trafficked victims involved appears to be as inappropriate a response as banning nail bars, chinese restaurants and car washes, all of which have been shown to have been using high proportions of trafficked victims. In fact it is more likely, in my view, that treating sex workers or their clients as criminals will make it harder to gather the intelligence required for defeating organised trafficking.

There is also an issue when one considers how gender has affected our responses to trafficking (Kemi Badenoch -. The Mayor of London’s trafficking strategy is contained within his Violence against Women and Girls strategy.) This has led to the distorted allocation of resources as there are a substantial number of victims who are male.

The recent conclusion of Amnesty International that sex work should be considered as work seems to point towards a more balanced view of prostitution and one that enables sex workers access to justice, rights and services that are there to protect them.

References:
Silence on Violence – Andrew Boff: http://glaconservatives.co.uk/silence-on-violence/
Shadow City – Andrew Boff: http://glaconservatives.co.uk/blog/authorities-blind-hidden-crime-human-trafficking-capital/
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