

Statement of Asia-Pacific Meeting of Sex Trafficking and Prostitution Survivors

April 3, 2011, New Delhi, India

In this meeting, we have shared stories of resistance, survival, healing, recovery, accessing education, self-organizing and mobilization.

Collectively, we agree to reject the legalization of the prostitution industry which serves as the demand side to sex trafficking, and to punish the buyers and the business, instead of the women. As Fatima, one of our leaders said, "As long as there are buyers, we will not end sex trafficking."

Laws in the region have long been criminalizing and stigmatizing those exploited in prostitution, when they are the ones whom society and government should protect.

Prostitution thrives because of the false ideas that women are inferior, sexual objects and commodities while men are superior, the sole decision-makers and owners of properties. Many of us have been victimized in child marriage, incestuous rape, different forms of child abuse, and domestic violence before we were victimized in prostitution. The system thrives because economic disparity widens between the rich and the poor. Because state policies continue to compromise our countries to sex tourists, foreign and local military, and big business, at the expense of our women's livelihoods and bodily integrity. These are the workings of patriarchal, militarist and neo-liberal economic policies.

We unite with our sisters in the feminist movement and the labor movement who call for real jobs, not prostitution; for economic programs that create local, sustainable employment, and not push women out of the country; for the socialization of the care economy while recognizing that domestic work is work; for greater budget for women and away from military expenditures.

We unite with the Dalits, aborigines and indigenous peoples' movements in the region who decry the targeting of our communities for sex trafficking and prostitution.

We have young people, including men, and grassroots women with us, who continue to challenge not only economic and political systems but also ideologies of masculinity that continue to subordinate women.

We also call for comprehensive health services for us as women and our children, as our health needs are manifold. We call on HIV-AIDS advocates to reject the legalization of the sex industry, not to resign to calling prostitution as "sex work", but to bring back the advocacy to women's reproductive rights and sexual rights, which is about women's control over our own bodies, not exploitation by buyers and the industry.

Feminist healing shall recognize the continuum of violence, promote alternative families (instead of pushing them back to areas of origin where they may be revictimized), foster community support, and bring out women's creativity. All services should include their children.

We call for income-generating projects that are gender-sensitive (non-traditional work) and uphold the principles of cooperativism, sustainability, shared profits and fair trade.

Governments should provide housing as many women and children in prostitution cannot be returned to communities where relatives are their perpetrators.

We call for free legal aid for victims and witness protection. We call on local and national governments to involve the women survivors in policy-making, and to revoke licenses of prostitution establishments.

We and the youth among us call for the gender-sensitization of and greater access to higher education.

Social movements have to carry out prevention and public information campaigns alongside us, and help in shifting the stigma away from the victims and onto the perpetrators – the buyers and the business.

We call on the application of citizenship rights to all, especially the women in prostitution, as a fundamental human right. Victims of cross-border trafficking should not be forcibly removed from a country of destination but be accorded services consistent with the Palermo Protocol principles.

We will strengthen our self-help groups, and our networks among youths, survivors and social movements. We will primarily call for the removal of provisions in laws that criminalize women in prostitution, and put provisions that will criminalize the buyers and the business. These laws shall include extradition of traffickers and buyers to ensure their prosecution.

“Nobody is our owner”, as one of our leaders, Fatima, stated. Not the husband, not the father, not the pimp, not the buyer, not the sex industry. We reiterate that we stand for our bodily integrity and autonomy.

Finally, we collectively pledge to continue our journey to healing, recovery, empowerment and activism, as we educate, organize and mobilize ourselves to change society and uproot patriarchy, racism, casteism, militarism and capitalism which generated and sustain prostitution and sex trafficking.

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For more information contact

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