

1 WORK REPORT

Cherry and Kendy went to Manila , the Philippines to attend the Asia Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing +15 (22-24 Oct).

The forum was held to review the implementation of Beijing Platform for Action in the region, examine whether the situation of women had improved accordingly, and identify new opportunities and arising challenges for women's movements. Apart from reviewing the development of women's movements in the past 15 years, issues discussed also included "an agency for women in the UN", "gender in climate change and disaster risk reduction" and "gender and human security in situations of conflict and pos-conflict" etc.

In attending this forum, we aimed to enhance our understanding of various issues about women, and to bring issues about sex workers and the sex industry into the regional level discussions. During the forum, we joined workshops about human trafficking, on the one hand to understand more about other NGOs' frontline experience on providing services and support to trafficked women, and on the other hand to share our view that instead of solving the problem of human trafficking, prohibiting sex work or criminalizing sex work would only force the industry and the workers to go underground and make it even less safe. At the same time, generalizing sex work as forced migration and labor neglects the right of choice of sex workers. We hope that diversity among women can be recognized, and both victims of human trafficking and individuals who choose to work as sex workers can be protected, respected and supported.

2 FUTURE WORK

2.1 Walk for Life – AFRO's Annual Walkathon

Last call! AFRO' s annual walkathon will be held on 8 Nov (Sun). Please check out the following link for the event details and registration/ donation form and send it back to us by emailing to contact@afro.org.hk or faxing to 27701201:

<http://www.afro.org.hk/pdf/form/20090929-walkforlife2009.pdf>

2.2 URGENT!!! AFRO's Fund Raising Bazaar

AFRO's Fund Raising Bazaar will be held on 13 Dec at Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier. At this moment we are still short of items for the sale, and therefore very much in need of your help

and support. Please kindly contact us at 27701065 if you know any free sources of merchandise supply.

Thank you so much!!

3 AFRO's NEWS READING

Sex workers call prostitution laws unconstitutional

<http://www.nationalpost.com/news/story.html?id=2071542>

6-10-2009

Natalie Alcoba, National Post

A dominatrix and two sex trade workers are in a Toronto courtroom on Tuesday morning arguing that Canada 's prostitution laws are unconstitutional. Specifically, the women say provisions of the Criminal Code that make it illegal to run a bawdy house, illegal to live on the avails of prostitution and to communicate for the purpose of prostitution deprive sex trade workers of their right to security by prohibiting conditions that would make the work safer. They also argue that the laws deprive them of their right to liberty by endangering them with imprisonment.

The applicants are Terri-Jean Bedford, a former sex trade worker who worked as a dominatrix before her "Bondage Bungalow" in Thornhill was raided, Valerie Scott, who has worked in the sex trade and who now advocates for the rights of sex workers and Amy Lebovitch, a prostitute since 1997.

The parties responding and intervening in the application are the attorney general of Canada , of Ontario , and groups like the Catholic Civil Rights League and REAL Women of Canada .

"This case is not about a constitutional right to be a prostitute," Alan Young, who is representing the women, said in his opening remarks. He said what this is about liberty and security in a profession that is already legal in Canada .

Mr. Young said the law operates as a "sinister contradiction" because the government wants prostitutes off the street, but then increases legal sanctions against people who conduct their business indoors, or hire people to protect them.

Outside the courthouse, he added: "The streets of Canada are no place for anybody to work. It is legal to sell sex, but the government of Canada has constructed a regime where every safe and secure setting is prohibited."

The government's position is that prostitution is dangerous, no matter the setting.

Michael Morris, counsel for the attorney general of Canada, said the applicants have failed to show how their charter rights are breached.

"The Supreme Court upheld two of these three provisions in 1990, and we say nothing has changed since then in terms of demonstrating that there are new grounds," he said. Mr. Morris said the government believes prostitution "carries dangers and harms to the community at large" and it's on those grounds that legitimate state interests are protected by the laws.

Ranjan Agarwal, a lawyer for the Catholic Civil Rights League, the Christian Legal Fellowship and REAL Women of Canada, said his clients worry that striking down the provisions is "a gateway to legitimizing prostitution in Canadian life".

Ms. Scott, who started selling sex when she was 24 and is now 51, is not surprised by the opposition. "This really has to end," Ms. Scott said of the laws.

"Just because some people have a moral problem with the idea of commercial sex does not make it alright for us to be the social punching bag for society."

She said this case is about safety and reason.

Comment:

This case provides a clear picture on the seeking of legal reform on the sex industry. Neither the prohibition of sex workers on street, nor the criminalisation of running a brothel, would make the society any safer. Instead, the government should look upon and solve the root of the problem, rather than depriving their right to security by prohibiting conditions that would make the work safer.

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