

We shall
Overcome
Some day

हम होंगे
कामयाव,
एकदिन

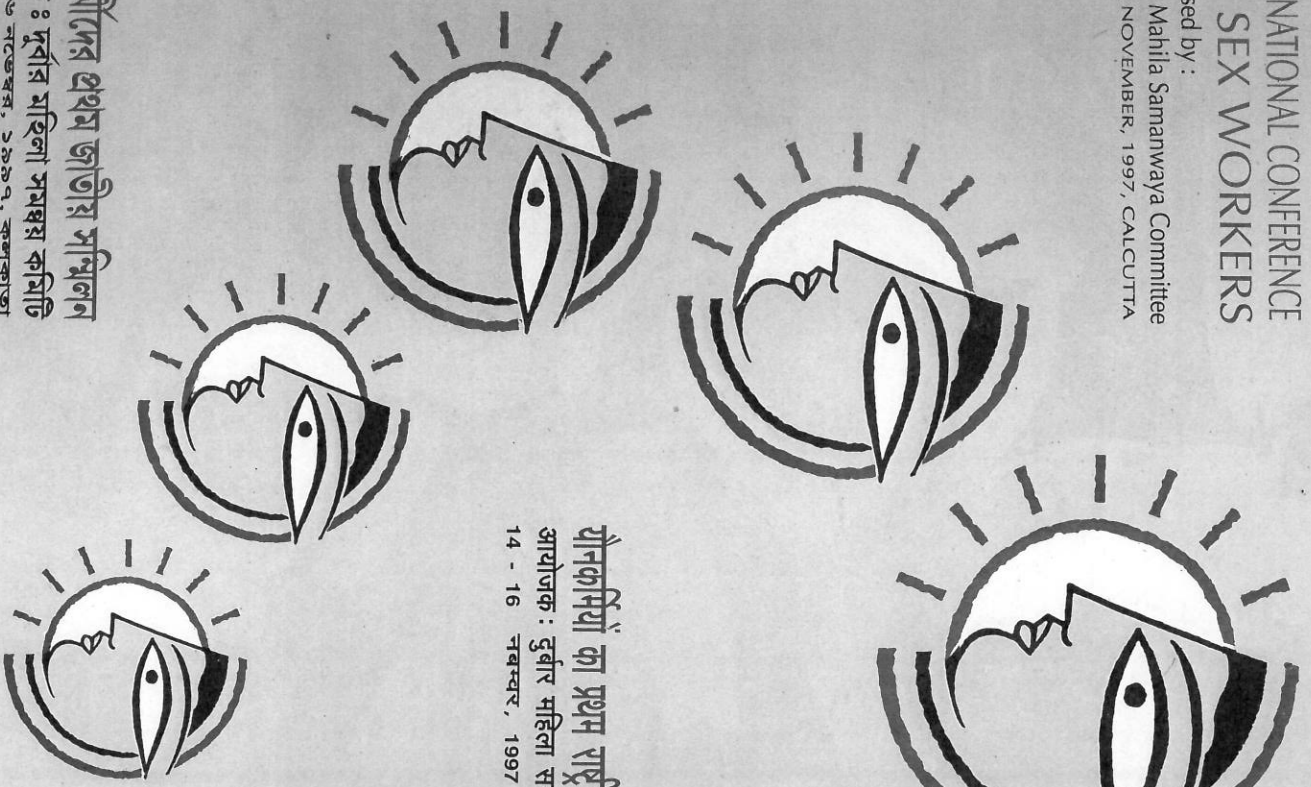
আমরা
করবো জয়,
নিশ্চয়

Printed and published by Sadhana Mukherjee on behalf of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, 8/2, Bhawani Dutta Lane, Calcutta 700 073, India and printed from Print-O-Graph, 9C, Bhawani Dutta Lane, Calcutta 700 073

FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF SEX WORKERS

Organised by:
Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee
14 - 16 NOVEMBER, 1997, CALCUTTA

যৌনকর্মীদের প্রথম জাতীয় সম্মেলন
সংগঠক : দুর্বার মহিলা সমন্বয় কমিটি
১৪ - ১৬ নভেম্বর, ১৯৯৭, কলকাতা



यौनकर्मियों का प्रथम राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन
आयोजक : दुर्बार महिला समन्वय कमेटी
14 - 16 नवम्बर, 1997, कलकत्ता

1997

Done



First National Conference of Sex Workers

Organised by :

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee

At : Yuba Bharati Krirangan, Calcutta, India

On : 14 - 16 November, 1997



यौनकर्मियों का प्रथम राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन

आयोजक :

दुर्बार महिला समन्वय कमेटी

स्थान : युवभारती क्रीडांगन, कलकत्ता, भारत

तारिख : 14 - 16 नवम्बर, 1997



যৌনকর্মীদের প্রথম জাতীয় সম্মিলন

সংগঠক :

দুর্বার মহিলা সমন্বয় কমিটি

স্থান : যুবভারতী ক্রীড়াঙ্গন, কলকাতা

তারিখ : ১৪ - ১৬ নভেম্বর, ১৯৯৭



MESSAGE

ASOK BHATTACHARYA

Minister-in-Charge
Municipal Affairs Department

And

Urban Development Department
Government of West Bengal
Writers' Buildings, Calcutta 700 001

27th October, '97

I am glad to learn that Mahila Samanwya Committee is going to organise its National Conference on 14th November, 1997 at Yuba Bharati Kirangan, Calcutta.

I convey my greetings to the Organisers and wish the Conference all success.

Sd/-

(Asok Bhattacharya)



MESSAGE

BISWANATH CHOWDHURY

Minister-in-Charge

Home (Jails) Dept. And Social Welfare Dept.
Government of West Bengal

Writers' Buildings, Calcutta 700 001

7th October 1997

It gives me great pleasure to note that Mahila Samanwaya Committee, 8/2, Bhawani Dutta Lane, Calcutta - 73 is going to organise its National Conference from 14-11-97 to 16-11-97 at Salt Lake Stadium, Calcutta on various important issues like prevention of entry of minor girls in sex trade, providing health care and education facilities to the children of sex workers, vocational training to the aged and protection of their legal rights alongwith fighting social injustices against the sex workers.

The noble attempt of the committee to achieve all round development of sex workers deserve appreciation.

I wish all success of the conference.

Sd/-

(Biswanath Chowdhury)



MESSAGE

BHAKTI BHUSHAN MANDAL

Minister-in-Charge

Department of Co-operation
Government of West Bengal

Writer's Buildings, Calcutta 700 001

3rd November, 1997

It gives me immense pleasure to know that Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee is going to hold the National Conference of Sex Workers on and from 14th November to 16 November, 1997 at Yuba Bharati Krirangan, Calcutta. The mission of the said Committee is to protect the interest of sex profession and to fight against Social injustice as suffered by the sex-workers. I think, such Conferences/Seminars will help to rouse the feelings of sympathy of the common people towards the sex-workers to have the social justice.

I wish the conference success and convey my well wishes to the organisers.

Sd/-

(B. B. Mondal)



MESSAGE

PARTHA DE

Minister-in-Charge

Department of Health and Family Welfare

Government of West Bengal

Calcutta 700 001

23rd October, 1997

I am happy to learn that the Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee – a Unit of the sex-workers would be holding its 1st National Conference during November 14- 16, 1997 at Yuba Bharati Kirirangan, Calcutta.

To commemorate the occasion they are going to publish also a souvenir.

I wish success of their great efforts.

SD/-

(Partha De)



MESSAGE

SANTI GHATAK

Minister-in-Charge

Labour Department

Government of West Bengal

Writers' Buildings, Calcutta 700 001

27th October, 1997

I have come to know that Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee is going to organise their First National Conference to be held on and from 14th to 16th November, 1997 at Yuba Bharati Kirirangan (Salt Lake City), Calcutta.

I wish the occasion a grand success.

SD/-

(Santi Ghatak)



MESSAGE

DR S. K. MISRA

Minister

Land and Land Reforms and Panchayat And
Rural Development Departments
Government of West Bengal
Writers' Buildings, Calcutta 700 001

5th November, 1997

I am glad to learn that the National Conference of Sex Workers is going to be held under the auspices of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, a Forum of Sex Workers, on 14th, 15th and 16th November, 1997 at Yuba Bharati Krirangan (Salt Lake Stadium), Calcutta. It is no denying the fact that this segment of the society was allowed to be neglected so long. It is gratifying to note that apart from legislations and various measures taken by the Govt., the non-Govt. and voluntary organisations like Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee are coming forward for effective intervention in the area with a view to protecting the interest of sex profession and securing the social justice for the sex workers.

On this occasion, I convey my greetings to the organisers, the participants and to those who matter and wish the ensuing conference a success:

Sd/-

(Dr S. K. Mishra)



MESSAGE

SUBHAS CHAKRABORTY

Minister-in-Charge
Transport & Sports Deptt.
Govt. of West Bengal
Writers' Buildings, Calcutta 700 001

7. 11. 97

I am glad to know that Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee is going to organise the 1st National Conference of Sex Workers in Calcutta on and from 14th to 16th November, 1997.

I send my greetings to them and wish their above Conference a grand success.

Sd/-

(Subhas Chakraborty)



MESSAGE

PRASANTA CHATTERJEE

Mayor

The Calcutta Municipal Corporation
Central Municipal Office
5 S. N. Banerjee Road, Calcutta 700 013
West Bengal, India

24. 10.97

I am glad to know that Mahila Samanwaya Committee is holding the National Conference of Sex Workers on and from 14th Nov. to 16th Nov. at Yuba Bharati Kirangan, Calcutta in which three thousand delegates from all over the Country will participate.

I hope the deliberation will help us to resolve various social, legal and ethical issues pertaining to sex and sex trade and will also discuss the remedial measures regarding the possibility of spreading AIDS due to the reluctant attitude of the customers/sex workers.

I send my good wishes and hope the conference a success.

Sd/-

(Prasanta Chatterjee)



MESSAGE

PROF. K. J. NATH

Director

Government of India
All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health
(Directorate General of Health Services)
110 Chitranjan Avenue, Calcutta 700 073

3. 9. 97

I am extremely happy to know that the First National Conference of the Sex Workers – organised by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee would be held in Calcutta during 14 - 16 November, 1997. The Committee is committed to the social, economic and overall development of the sex-workers. Sex workers, for a long time, has been suffering due to extremely poor level of health care and lack of education. They are being exploited by the middle men and are totally ignorant about their social rights and economic well-being. In this context, the pioneering and path-finding works carried out by the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee among the Sex Workers, are extremely commendable and I am sure they will continue to provide dedicated services to this very neglected sector of our population.

I wish the conference all success.

Sd/-

(Prof. K. J. Nath)



MESSAGE

DR. S. K. SATPATHY

Government of India
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
National AIDS Control Organisation
Room No. 523, A Wing, Nirman Bhawan
New Delhi 110 011

27 October, 1997

Thank you very much for inviting me to present views on the topic "Central Issue of AIDS Control is restoration of human rights" in the 1st National Conference of Sex Workers scheduled to be held from 14-16 October, 1997 at Calcutta. I would have liked very much to participate in the above deliberation but for my preoccupation which has already been fixed much before the receipt of your letter, I regret my inability to attend the said conference.

I wish very fruitful discussion on the above mentioned subject.

With regards,

Sd/-

(Dr S. K. Satpathy)



শুভেচ্ছা

আপনাদের সংগঠন সমাজের একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সমস্যা নিয়ে আলোচনায় নিজেদের যুক্ত করেছেন এবং প্রচার আন্দোলনে প্রতি হয়েছেন জেলে ব্যক্তিগতভাবে আমি খুশী হয়েছি। কিন্তু সমাজে একটি বিশেষ অংশের মহিলাদের বিষয় সামাজিক আন্দোলনে যুক্ত সবস্তরের মানুষজনের কাছে এখনও সম্পূর্ণ পরিচিত বিষয় নয়। নানাভাবে অবহেলিত, বঞ্চিত এবং অত্যাচারিত মহিলাদের মধ্যে কাজ করার অভিজ্ঞতার ভিত্তিতে আপনাদের মহিলা সমন্বয় কমিটি একটু বড় আকারে সম্মেলনের আয়োজন করে সমাজবন্ধ মানুষের দৃষ্টি আকর্ষণ করার জন্য যে জাতীয় সম্মেলনের আয়োজন করেছে তা নানা দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীতে আলোচনার মাধ্যমে সার্থক হোক, প্রত্যাশা করছি। আপনাদের জাতীয় মহিলা সম্মেলনের সাফল্য কামনা করছি।

অভিনন্দনসহ

স্বাক্ষর

(বিমান বসু)



MESSAGE

NORMA JEAN ALMODOVAR
International Sex Worker Foundation of
Art, Culture and Education
8801 Cedros Ave. # 7 Panorama City
CA 91402

August 14, 1997

It is with deepest regret that I have to inform you that I will not be able to attend your wonderful conference in November. I recently returned from visiting Cheryl Overs in London and other sex workers in Europe for our new organisation. Unfortunately, my health has not been the best and I do not feel that at this time I would be able to travel the long distance to your country. . . .

I will think of all of you with the best wishes for a successful conference and look forward to hearing all about it whenever you write a report about it. Congratulations on your conference!

Warmest Regards,

Sd/-

(Norma Jean Almodovar)



MESSAGE

CHERYL OVERS
Network of Sex Work Projects
29-35 Farringdon Road, London, EC1M 3JB, UK

22. 10. 97

I am one among many people from sex work organisations throughout the world who have watched with awe and admiration as this remarkable organisation has developed and notched up one achievement after another. Durbar Mahila Samanwya Committee is a model of self advocacy and a testament to the power of marginalised people to participate as equals in social and political life. For fellow activists everywhere they are an inspiration and a rich source of knowledge and experience. I am sure that sharing ideas and information at this conference will be a important and historical moment in the struggle for justice for sex workers locally, nationally and globally.

Sd/-

(Cheryl Overs)



MESSAGE

UNAIDS

UNICEF • UNDP • UBFP
UNESCO • WHO • WORLD BANK

Geneva, Switzerland

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has brought unending adversities to economies, societies, nations, communities and individuals. But it has also brought out the best in people and forced an openness in society about questions that have so far remained hidden from public fora. The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee deserves felicitations for the courage and conviction shown in breaking the silence around sex work and standing up for the rights of sex workers, including to protection from HIV/AIDS. The National Conference of Sex Workers being organized from 14-16 November 1997 in Calcutta is a clear sign of the accumulated strength of this collective effort. I hope that during the deliberations at which you will address a range of issues that concern you most, the roots of vulnerability to HIV/AIDS will also be discussed, and that you will share with the world, the lessons that can be learnt from your courageous efforts to organize yourself and ensure prevention and care in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. I wish you success in your deliberations and in your continued efforts.

Best Regards,

Sd/-

(Peter Piot)
Executive Director



MESSAGE

UNAIDS - INDIA

UNICEF • UNDP • UNFPA
UNESCO • WHO • WORLD BANK

22 October, 1997

We regret to inform you that UNAIDS will not be able to participate in the First National Conference of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee.

We wish you every success.

Regards,

Sd/-

(Doris D'Cruz-Grote)
Office-in-Charge

JOINT UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME ON HIV/AIDS
UNAIDS, C-199, Defence Colony, New Delhi 110 024



MESSAGE

The World Bank

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
International Development Association
1818 H Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20433, U.S.A.

6th October 1997

Thank you for your letter dated September 29 informing about the First National Conference of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee. Unfortunately I will not be able to attend because of prior commitments. I wish you and your colleagues a successful conference.

Sd/-

(Kazuko Uchimura)
Project Advisor
South Asia Region



MESSAGE

World Health Organization

Geneva, Switzerland

27. 10. 97

It is with great enthusiasm and encouragement that we come in support to the First National Conference of Sex Workers. Its lead theme, sex worker's right to self determination is one of great importance and a tremendous challenge for autonomy, respect and prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The creation of a council is a major step towards self regulation and control over the numerous abuses that the profession of sex work has to face. Self-esteem, dignity and confidence are the first step to give respect a chance and chart out a better future for a trade that embodies all of humanity's frailness.

Humanity's meaning, its purpose, lie in its aspirations, dreams and struggles. This is an eloquent struggle, devoid of bitterness and resolutely turned to the future, painting humanity at its loneliest and most vulnerable but also at its hardest and most courageous.

Within the Indian context, this forum is a unique event and a model at the international level. We wish you every success in licensing the profession, which will end harassment and take you closer to living your dreams.

Sd/-

(Thierry Mertens)



MESSAGE

World Health Organization

3. 11. 97

I have become a true admirer of the work that the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee is doing and wish I could be there for the conference. Unfortunately, travel plans prevent me from being in Calcutta at that time. I sincerely hope you accept my apologies.

I wish you every success with the upcoming conference and the continued efforts of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee.

Sd/-

(Kevin O'Reilly)

20 avenue Appia * CH-1211 Geneva 2 * Switzerland



MESSAGE

British High Commission
British Development Cooperation Office
50-M Shantipath (Gate No. 4, Niti Marg)
Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110 021

DFID

Department For International
Development

5 November, 1997

All around the world, group of sex workers, women and men, have been getting together to improve the quality of their lives and to influence the policies and actions of people in authority.

What do they mean by quality of life? Sometimes it's simply the self esteem that comes from knowing that people, especially people in authority, are taking them seriously as individuals and recognising their rights. The right to health care. The right to education for themselves and their children. The right to be protected from diseases like gonorrhoea and HIV infection. The right to be treated with dignity. It is reasonable to expect these rights to be respected - they are, after all, enshrined in the United Nations Charter and other international documents.

By organising into groups, they have learned that they have influence. They can persuade their clients to use condoms and pay them fairly. They can teach health departments about sex-workers' special needs. They can improve the quality of policing. By working together they can get a fairer share of resources for their communities, they can persuade politicians to change bad laws, they can let each other know about violent clients.

When sex-worker organisations form international coalitions they can influence global policy. The World Health Organisation and UNAIDS routinely listen to the views of sex-workers, and

they encourage governments to do so as well. Cooperation with other groups is useful, too – when sex-workers met the Vice President and Prime Minister of India last year, it was a result of working with the National Council of Women.

Your conference is vitally important. It is building on a movement that is already well-rooted in India, and it will take it a step further. Sharing information is the first step in learning about what can be done. Just gathering together increases the sense of personal and professional identity. Identity builds inner strength. Those things, combined, lead to ideas for action – and to the commitment and power to take action.

You are powerful. You are a force for good. You can make life better for yourselves, your children, and for the communities in which you live. You can change what happens in this world.

I consider it a privilege that DFID is able, through its support for the West Bengal Sexual Health Project, to help sex workers to overcome some of the health problems linked to their job.

I wish you the very best for a successful conference.

Sd/-

(Bob Grose)

Health Programme Manager
British Development Cooperation Office, Delhi
UK Department for International Development (formerly ODA)



MESSAGE

Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce
P. O. Box 373, Salt River 7924
Cape Town, South Africa

7. 11. 97

The Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) based in Cape Town, South Africa, sends our greetings to our friends in India.

Never before in history has there been so much activity focused around prostitution. Our rights as sex workers are slowly beginning to be understood as not only worker rights, but also human rights. Whilst the anti-sex workers fight us and our cause for equity and justice, we will attempt to reach out and support one another in a hope that one day all sex workers around the world will be given the honour and credit we so richly deserve.

We wish you all well for your conference and our thoughts are with you. We are unable to attend due to financial constraints.

Forward for Whore Power !!!
In Prostitute Solidarity

Sd/-

(Shane A. Petzer)
SWAT, South Africa
Southern African Representative for the
International Network for Sex Work Projects



MESSAGE

International Foundation For Sexual Health

Royal Bolton Hospital
Minerva Road, Farnworth
BOLTON BL4 0JR UK

6. 11. 97

I am glad to learn that the First National Conference of sex workers is scheduled to be held at Calcutta during 14 - 16 November, 1997. I have already learnt about Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) and their activities. I whole heartedly support the cause they are fighting for. The DMSC has indeed brought to the fore an issue that was neglected so far.

I wish the conference a grand success.

With best wishes and warm regards.

Sd/-

(Dr Debashis Mandal)



MESSAGE

Imperial College

of Science, Technology and Medicine
Department of Social Science and Medicine
200 Seagrave Road, London SW6 IRQ

27th October, 1997

Thank you so much for your information of the First National Conference of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee between the 14th and 16th of November, 1997.

Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend the meeting due to previous commitments. I do, however, very much appreciate the invitation and wish you and your colleagues all success with the meeting.

Very best wishes,

Sd/-

Dr Adrian Renton
Reader in Social Medicine and Epidemiology



MESSAGE

Population Council

South & East Asia – Thailand Office

P.O. Box 11-1213, Nalla Post Office, Bangkok 10113, Thailand

22nd October, 1997

Unfortunately, due to prior commitments, I cannot travel to Calcutta on November 14-16. Please accept my apologies and best wishes for a successful conference.

Best regards,

Sd/-

(Christopher Elias)



MESSAGE

Vietnam Women's Union

39 Hang Chuoi, Hanoi, Vietnam

29th October, 1997

Greetings to you from the Vietnam Women's Union.

The theme of the Conference is very interesting. Unfortunately, because of the short notice, we do not think we can attend this conference. We wish your conference successful.

Thank you for your cooperation on this matter.

With best regards,

Sd/-

(Tran Thi Hoa)
Deputy-director
International Relations Dept.



MESSAGE

V. R. KRISHNA IYER

Former Judge, Supreme Court
"SATGAMAYA"

M. G. Road, Ernakulam, Kochi 682011

26th August, 1997

I am deeply interested in humanisation and human rights of women in distress driven to sex work and I am also of the view that society is hardly just or fair towards them in rehabilitating them. But having regard to many circumstances connected with my travels including age I am not able to commit myself to being present at your conference. Nevertheless, I will try to be there for some part of the day and meet you all. I wish these unfortunate sisters a better deal from State and Society.

Sd/-

(V. R. Krishna Iyer)



MESSAGE

SWAMI AGNIVESH

Bonded Labour Liberation Front

7 Jantar Mantar Road, New Delhi 110 001

3rd October 1997

Thank you very much for your invitation dated 11th September, 1997. I am glad to know about the good work which you are doing on a very vital issue.

I am organising a National Convention of Arya Samaj on a Total Prohibition (Purna Nasha Mukti) Sammelan on 15-16 November, 1997 at Talkatora Stadium here in New Delhi. As such I regret my inability to participate in your National Conference on 14-16 November.

I wish Durbhar Mahila Samanwaya Committee a great success.

With best wishes,

Sd/-

(Swami Agnivesh)
Chairperson



MESSAGE

SOMENDRA NATH MITTRA

Member

West Bengal Legislative Assembly

44-C Raja Rammohan Roy Sarani

P.S. and T.O. Amherst Street, Calcutta 700 009

৫. ৯. ৯৭

আগামী ১৪-১৬ নভেম্বর, ১৯৯৭ কলকাতায় যৌনকর্মীদের সংগঠন 'দুর্বার মহিলা সমন্বয় কমিটি' তাহাদের প্রথম জাতীয় সম্মেলনের আয়োজন করেছে জেনে আমি খুশি। সমাজে অবহেলিত এই বিশাল সংখ্যক মানব যতে সমাজের কাছে সঠিক বিচার ও সহায়তা পায় সেটাই এই সংগঠনের মূল লক্ষ্য হোক এই কামনা করি।

উক্ত সম্মেলনের সবঙ্গিন সাফল্য কামনা করি ও সম্মেলনে অংশগ্রহনকারীদের প্রতি রহল আমার আন্তরিক অভেছা।

স্বাক্ষর

(সোমেন্দ্র নাথ মিত্র)



MESSAGE

P. M. NAIR

Dy Inspector General of Police

Central Bureau of Investigation

Special Crimes Division

C.G.O. Complex, Block No. 4

Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110 003

5. 10. 97

The subject on which you are organizing a National Conference is of tropical interest; if all those who are concerned with the welfare of women and children, involve in this business.

I wish, I could join the conference but, unfortunately, I will be away on some other engagement. I wish the conference all success. However, I may be visiting Calcutta before that. I would be in touch with you during that time.

Thanking you,

Sd/-

(P.M. Nair)



MESSAGE

AMRITA BHATTACHARYA
Government of India
National Commission for Women
4 Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg
New Delhi 110 002

22 October, 1997

I wish you every success for the conference of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee on and from 14-16 November, 1997.

Thanking you,

Sd/-

(Amrita Bhattacharya)
Counsellor



শুভেচ্ছা

আপনাদের সমস্যা সম্পর্কে আলোচনা করার জন্য আগামী ১৪-১৬ নভেম্বর, '৯৭ যে জাতীয় সম্মেলন আহ্বান করেছেন তার সাফল্য কামনা করছি। এই সম্মেলনে উপস্থিত থাকার জন্য আমাকে আমন্ত্রণ জানানোর জন্য আমি আনন্দিত। আমি উপস্থিত থেকে আপনাদের সমস্যা জানতে পারলে সুবিধা হতো। কিন্তু পূর্বনির্ধারিত কর্মসূচির জন্য এই দিনের অনুষ্ঠানে উপস্থিত থাকতে পারছি না। এ জন্য আমি দুঃখিত।...

আশা করি আপনাদের সম্মেলন সময়সূচীর গতি-প্রকৃতি নির্ধারণে সাহায্য করবে।
ধন্যবাদ।

স্বাক্ষর
(অনিল বিশ্বাস)



MESSAGE

V. MOHINI GIRI

Chairperson

Government of India

National Commission For Women

4 Deendayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi 110 002

11. 11. 97

My greetings to the delegates of the National Conference of Sex workers (14-16 Nov; 97) organised by Mahila Samanwaya Committee at Calcutta.

National Commission for Women has identified the problems of women in prostitution and sexual exploitation of child as an important thrust area. Sex workers face a variety of complex problems ranging from social astrocism, their vulnerability to disease, the plight of their children and near destitution during old age. While the Govt. fully recognise the existence of these problems, its method of tackling them are often not in tune with realities and , therefore, the benefits are very much less.

Much of the work in the field of exploitation of women is initiated by NCW through the extensive tour across the length and breadth of the country and personal observance of their conditions. The remedial measures are suggested to the authorities on such feed back as well as those furnished by NGOs like Mahila Samanwaya Committee.

It is relevant to mention that the National Consultation organised by NCW at Goa on 23-24 July, 1997 on "Sexual Exploitation of Children", NGOs, Media persons, Journalists, State Commission for Women, Govt. representatives and others participated and delibrated on the various issues relating to prostitution, Law and Legal Mechanisms, Rescue and Rehabilitation of girls in prostitution, Health responses towards the issue of sexual abuse of children within and outside prostitution, Role of Agencies child prostitutes, Tourism and Paedophilia, prostitution through religious sanction, prevention, education and counselling and made specific recommendations. These recommendations are to be implemented.

Efforts like the present one help in focussing attention to specific needs. I wish the Conference all success.

Sd/-

(V. Mohini Giri)



MESSAGE

C. S. SAMAL

Principal Secretary

Government of West Bengal

Department of Social Welfare

Writers' Buildings, Calcutta 700 001

11 November, 1997

It gives me great pleasure in extending good wishes to the members of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee on the occasion of First National Conference of Sex Workers at Yuba Bharati Kirirangon. I am confident that this conference will creat wide-spread awareness of the rights of Sex Workers, safe sex environment and strengthen net work among Sex Workers.

I wish the conference all success.

Sd/-

(C. S. Samal)



MESSAGE

DEBAPRASAD JANA
Indian Administrative Service
Additional District Magistrate &
Additional Collector, (General)
Howrah 711 101, West Bengal

8 November, 1997

The 1st National Conference of Sex Workers is being held from 14 to 16 November, 1997 at the Yuba Bharati Krirangan under the auspices of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee. This committee has remained actively involved in the STD/HIV Intervention Programme for the last few years in Red Light Areas of West Bengal including Howrah in collaboration with AIH & PH, WHO, UNAIDS, NACO, NORAD, DFID (UK), Government of West Bengal and Government of India. The sex workers are part of the populace of the State having various problems, which need to be addressed by all concerned with due sympathy and social obligations.

I convey my best wishes towards successful organisation of the conference.

Sd/-
(D. P. Jana)





Sex Workers' Manifesto

Theme paper of the First National Conference of Sex Workers organised by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, at Yuba Bharati Krirangan (Salt Lake Stadium), Calcutta, 14-16 November, 1997

A new spectre seems to be haunting the Society. Or maybe those phantom creatures who have been kept in the shades for ages are taking on human form—and that is why there is so much fear. For the last few years, the sex workers movement has made us confront many fundamental questions about social structures and relations, interlinkages between class, gender and sexuality, about politico-moral ethics. We think an intrinsic component of our movement is to go on searching for the answers to these questions and raise newer ones.

What is the sex workers' movement all about?

We came together as a collective community through our active involvement as health workers, the Peer Educators, in a STD/HIV Intervention Programme which has been running in Sonagachi, one of the oldest and largest red light areas of Calcutta since 1992. The Programme provided the initial space for building mutual support facilitating reflection and initiating collective action among us, sex workers. Very early in the life of the Sonagachi Project, with the empathetic support of those who had started the Project, clearly recognised that even to realise the very basic Project objectives of controlling transmission of HIV and STD among sex workers and out partners it was crucial to view us in our totality— as complete persons with a range of emotional and material needs, living within a concrete and specific social, political and ideological context which determine the quality of our lives and our health and not see us merely in terms of our sexual behaviour.

To give an example, while promoting the use of condoms, we soon realised that in order to change the sexual behaviour of sex workers it was not enough to enlighten us about the risks of unprotected sex or to improve our communication and negotiation skills. How will a sex worker who does not value herself at all think of taking steps to protect her health and her life? Even when fully aware of the necessity of using condoms to prevent disease transmission may not an individual sex

our moral ethical values. In 1995 we came to form Durbar Mahila Samanwaya committee, a forum exclusively of sex workers and their children to share experiences and plan strategies for struggling against our conditions of material deprivation and social stigmatisation. This was the first time that a group of sex workers rallied together and explicitly spoke of the rights and wrongs of our profession at a public forum and attempted to inscribe our self-defined and self-conscious identity as sex workers: the public sphere.

We believe that like any other occupation sex work too is an occupation not a moral condition. If it is one of the oldest professions in the world that is because it must have continued to meet an important and consistent social demand. But the 'prostitute' is rarely used to refer to an occupational group of women earn their livelihood through providing sexual services, rather it is deployed as a descriptive term denoting a homogenised category, usually of women, which poses threats to public health, sexual morality, social stability and civic order. Within this discursive boundary we systematically find ourselves to be targets of moralising impulses of dominant social groups through missions of cleansing and sanitising both materially and symbolically. If and when we figure in political or developmental agenda we are enmeshed in discursive practices and practical projects which aim to rescue, rehabilitate, improve, discipline, control or police us. Charity organisations are prone to rescue us and put us in 'safe' homes; developmental organisations are likely to 'rehabilitate' us through meagre income generation activities which in any case never help to erase out the stigma as 'former' prostitutes and police are bent upon regularly raiding our quarters in the name of controlling immoral trafficking.

Even when we are inscribed less negatively or even sympathetically within dominant discourses we are not exempt from stigmatisation or social exclusion. As powerless abused victims with no resources we are seen as objects of pity. Otherwise we appear as self-sacrificing and nurturing

supporting cast of characters in popular literature and cinema ceaselessly ready to give up our hard earned income to our clients, our 'sinful' ways and finally our lives to ensure the well-being of the hero or the society he represents. In either case we are refused enfranchisement as legitimate citizens or workers and are banished to the margins of society and history.

The kind of oppression that can be meted out to a sex worker can never be perpetrated against any other regular worker. The justification given is that sex work is not real work, it is morally sinful. As the whole structure and mechanisms of the sex industry are kept hidden behind the facade of sexual morality and social order, unlike other professions there is no transparency, legitimacy or scope for any discussion about the demands and needs of the workers of the sex industry.

People who are interested in our welfare, and we acknowledge many are genuinely concerned, often can not think beyond rehabilitating us or abolishing prostitution altogether. However, we know that in reality it is perhaps impossible to rehabilitate a sex worker because the society never allows to erase our identity as prostitutes, as morally violated and threatening. Then, is rehabilitation a feasible or even desirable option for us? In a country where unemployment is of such gigantic proportions, where does the compulsion of displacing millions of women and men who are already engaged in an income-earning occupation which supports themselves and their extended families come from? If other workers in similarly exploitative occupations can work within the structures of their profession to improve their working conditions why can not we, sex workers, remain in the sex industry and demand a better deal in our work and life?

What is the history of sexual morality?

Like other human propensities and desires, sexuality and sexual needs are fundamental and necessary to the human condition. But ethical and political ideas about sexuality and sexual practices are socially constructed and historically

and contextually specific. In the society as we know it now, ideologies about sexuality are deeply entrenched within structures of patriarchy and largely misogynist mores. The state and social structures only acknowledge a limited and narrow definition and role of our sexuality. In that definition pleasure, happiness, comfort and intimacy that find expression through sexuality are not privileged. On one hand we weave narratives around these in our literature and art. But on the other hand our societal norms and regulations allow for sexual expression only between men and women within the strict boundaries of marital relations within the institution of family.

Why have we circumscribed sexuality within such a narrow confine, ignoring its many other expressions, experiences and manifestations?

Ownership of private property and maintenance of patriarchy necessitate a control over women's sexual labour and reproduction. Since property lines are maintained through legitimate heirs and sexual intercourse between men and women alone carry the potential for procreation, capitalist patriarchy sanctions only such couplings. Sex is seen primarily and almost exclusively, as an instrument of reproduction, negotiating all aspects of pleasure and desire intrinsic to it. Privileging heterosexuality, homosexuality is not only denied justification because it is 'unproductive', its legitimacy is further controverted by branding it as undesirable, unnatural and deviant. Thus sex and sexuality are given no social sanction beyond their reproductive purpose within legally sanctioned heterosexual marriages.

When we assert that sex is primarily for pleasure and intimacy and not exclusively for procreative goals, do we then not value motherhood? Just because our profession or our social situation does not allow for legitimate parenthood, are we trying to claim motherhood and bearing children is unworthy and unimportant for women? That is definitely not the case. We feel that every woman has the right to bear children provided if she so wishes. But we also think that through trying to establish motherhood as the only and primary goal

for a woman the patriarchal structures try to control women's reproductive functions and curb their social and sexual autonomy. Many of us - sex workers - are mothers, our children are very precious to us. By social standards these children are illegitimate bastards. But at least they are ours and not mere instruments for maintaining some man's property or continuing his genealogy. However, we too are of course not uncontaminated by the ideologies of the society we live in. For many of us the impossible desire for a happy family, safe home and conjugal togetherness is a permanent source of pain.

Do men and women have equal claims to sexuality?

Societal norms about sex and sexuality do not apply similarly to men and women. If at all there is any acknowledgement of sexual needs beyond procreation, it is only of men. Even if there are minor variations from community to community and if in the name of modernity certain sexual mores have changed in some places it is still largely men who have had enjoyed the right to be polygamous or seek multiple sexual partners. Women have always been expected to be faithful to a single man. Beyond scriptural prohibitions too, social practices severely restrict the expression of female sexuality. As soon as a girl reaches her puberty her behaviour is strictly controlled and monitored so as not to provoke the male lust. In the name of 'decency' and 'tradition' a woman teacher is prohibited from wearing the clothes of her choice to the University. While selecting a bride for the son the men of the family scrutinise the physical attributes of a potential bride unashamedly. Pornographic representations of women satisfy the voyeuristic pleasures of millions of men. From shaving creams to bathroom fittings products are sold through attracting men by advertisements depicting women as sex objects.

In this political economy of sexuality there is no space for expression of women's own autonomous sexuality and desires. Women have to cover up their bodies to protect themselves from male gaze and at the same time bare themselves for male gratification. Even when

women are granted some amount of subjecthood by being represented as consumers in commercial media, that role is defined by their ability to buy and normed by capitalist and patriarchal strictures.

Is our movement anti-men?

Our movement is definitely against patriarchy, and men as a collective group who drive their social power over women from the patriarchal institutions, but not against all individual men. As it so happens, apart from the madams and landladies almost all people who profit from the sex trade are men. But what is more important is that their attitudes towards women and prostitution are biased with strong patriarchal values. They generally think of women as weak, dependent immoral or irrational - who need to be directed and disciplined. Conditioned by patriarchal gender ideologies both men and women in general approve of the control of sex trade and oppression of sex workers as necessary for maintaining social order. The power of this moral discourse is so strong that we prostitutes too tend to think of ourselves as morally corrupt and deprived. The men who come to us as clients are victims of the same ideology too. Sometimes the sense of sin adds to their thrill, sometimes it leads to perversion and almost always it creates a feeling of self loathing and guilt among them. Never does it allow for confident, honest, sexual interchange between consenting adults.

It is important to remember that there is no uniform category as men. Men like women are differentiated by their class, caste, race and other social relations. For many men adherence to the dominant sexual norms is not only impracticable but also unreal. The young men who look for sexual initiation, the married men who seek the company of other women, the migrant labourers separated from their wives who try to find warmth and companionship in the red light areas can not all be dismissed as evil and immoral. To do that will amount to dismissing a whole history of human search for desire, intimacy and mutual pleasure. Such dismissal creates an unfulfilled demand for sexual pleasure, the burden of which through

shared by men and women alike, ultimately weighs more heavily on women. Sexuality - which can be a basis of an equal healthy relationship between men and women, between people, becomes the source of further inequality and stringent control. This is what we oppose.

Next to any factory, truckers' check points, markets there have always been red light areas. The same system of productive relations and logic of profit maximisation which drives men from their homes in villages to towns and cities make women into sex workers for these men.

What is deplorable is that this patriarchal ideology is so deeply entrenched and the interest of men as a group is so solidly vested in it, that women's question hardly ever finds a place in mainstream political or social movements. The male workers who organise themselves against exploitation never address the issues of gender oppression, let alone the oppression of sex workers. Against the interests of women these radical men too defend the ideology of the family and patriarchy.

Are we against the institution of family?

In the perception of society we sex workers and in fact all women outside the relation of conjugality are seen as threats to the institution of family. It is said that enticed by us men stray from the straight and narrow, destroy the family. All institutions from religion to formal education reiterate and perpetuate this fear about us. Women and men too are the victims of this all pervasive misogyny.

We would like to stress strongly that the sex workers' movement is not against the institution of family. What we challenge is the inequity and oppression within the dominant notions of an ideal family which support and justify unequal distribution of power and resources within the structures of the family. What our movement aims at is working towards a really humanitarian, just and equitable structure of the family which is perhaps yet to exist.

Like other social institutions the family too is situated within the material and ideological

structures of the state and society. The basis of a normative ideal family is inheritance through legitimate heirs and therefore sexual fidelity. Historically the structures of families in reality have gone through many changes. In our country by and large joint families are being replaced by nuclear ones as a norm. In fact, in all societies people actually live their lives in many different ways, through various social and cultural relations - which deviate from this norm, but are still not recognised as the ideal by the dominant discourses.

If two persons love each other, want to be together, want to raise children together, relate to the social world it can be a happy, egalitarian, democratic arrangement. But does it really happen like that within families we see, between couples we know? Do not we know of many, many families where there is no love, but relations are based on inequality and oppression? Do not many legal virgins live the life of sex slaves in exchange of food and shelter? In most cases women do not have the power or the resources to opt out of such marriages and families. Sometimes men and women both remain trapped in empty relations by social pressure. Is this situation desirable? Is it healthy?

The whore and the Madonna - divide and rule

Within the oppressive family ideology it is women's sexuality that is identified as the main threat to conjugal relationship of a couple. Women are pitted against each other as wife against the prostitute, against the chaste and the immoral - both represented as fighting over the attention and lust of men. A chaste wife is granted no sexuality, only a de-sexed motherhood and domesticity. At the other end of the spectrum is the 'fallen woman' - a sex machine, unfettered by any domestic inclination or 'feminine' emotion. A woman's goodness is judged on the basis of her desire and ability to control and disguise her sexuality. The neighbourhood girl who dresses up can not be good, models and actresses are morally corrupt. In all cases female sexuality is controlled and shaped by patriarchy to reproduce the existing political economy of sexuality and safeguard the interest of men. A man has access to his docile

home-maker wife, the mother of his children and the prostitute who sustains his wildest sexual fantasies. Women's sexual needs are not only considered to be not important enough, in most cases its autonomy is denied or even its existence is erased.

Probably no one other than a prostitute really realises the extent of loneliness, alienation desire and yearning for intimacy that brings men to us. The sexual needs we meet for these men is not just about mechanical sexual act, not an momentary gratification of 'base' instincts. Beyond the sex act, we provide a much wider range of sexual pleasure which is with intimacy, touch and compatibility—a service which we render without any recognition of its significance. At least men can come to us for their sexual needs—however prurient or shameful the system of prostitution may be seen as. Women hardly have such recourse. The autonomy of women's sexuality is completely denied. The only option they have is to be prostitutes in the sex industry.

Why do women come to prostitution?

Women take up prostitution for the same reason as they may take up any other livelihood option available to them. Our stories are not fundamentally different from the labourer from Bihar who pulls a rickshaw in Calcutta, or the worker from Calcutta who works part time in a factory in Bombay. Some of us get sold into the industry. After being bonded to the madam who has bought us for some years we gain a degree of independence within the sex industry. A whole of us end up in the sex trade after going through many experiences in life—often unwillingly, without understanding all the implications of being a prostitute fully.

But when do most of us women have access to choice within or outside the family? Do we become casual domestic labourer willingly? Do we have a choice about who we want to marry and when? The choice is rarely real for most women, particularly poor women.

Why do we end up staying in prostitution? It is after all a very tough occupation. The physical

labour involved in providing sexual services to multiple clients in a working day is no less intense or rigorous than ploughing or working in a factory. It is definitely not fun and frolic. Then there are occupational hazards like unwanted pregnancy, painful abortions, risk of sexually transmitted diseases. In almost all red light areas housing and sanitation facilities are abysmal, the localities are crowded, most sex workers are quite poor and on top of it there is police harassment and violence from local thugs. Moreover to add to the material condition of deprivation and distress, we have to take on stigmatisation and marginalisation, — the social indignity of being 'sinful' being mothers of illegitimate children, being the target of those children's frustrations and anger.

Do we advocate 'free sex'?

What we advocate and desire is independent, democratic, non-coercive, mutually pleasurable and safe sex. Somehow sex seems to imply irresponsibility and lack of concern for other's well-being, which is not what we are working towards. Freedom of speech, expression of politics all come with obligations and need to acknowledge and accommodate other's freedom too. Freedom of sexuality should also come with responsibility and respect for other's needs and desires. We do want the freedom to explore and shape a healthy and mature attitude and practice about sex and sexuality-free from obscenity and vulgarity.

We do not yet know what this autonomous sexuality will be like in practice—we do not have the complete picture as yet. We are working people not soothsayers or prophets. When for the first time in history workers agitated for class equity and freedom from capitalist exploitation, when the blacks protested against white hegemony, when the feminists rejected the subordination of women they too did not know fully what the new system they were striving for would exactly be like. There is no exact picture of the 'ideal' future — it can only emerge and be shaped through the process of the movement.

All we can say, in our imagination of autonomous sexuality men and women will have equal access, will participate equally, will have the right to say yes or no and there will be no space for guilt of oppression.

We do not live in an ideal social world today. We do not know when and if ever an ideal social order will come into place. In our less than ideal world if we can accept the immorality of commercial transaction over food, or health why is sex for many so unethical and unacceptable. May be in an ideal world there will be no need for any such transactions—where material, emotional, intellectual and sexual needs of all will be met equitably and with pleasure and happiness. We do not know. All we can do now is to explore the current inequalities and injustices question their basis and confront, challenge and change them.

Which way is our movement going?

The process of struggle that we, the members of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee are currently engaged in has only just begun. We think our movement has two principal aspects. The first one is to debate, define and re-define the whole host of issues about gender, poverty, sexuality that are being thrown up within the process of the struggle itself. Our experience of Mahila Samanwaya Committee shows that for a marginalised group to achieve the smallest of gains, it becomes imperative to challenge an all-encompassing material and symbolic order that not only shapes the dominant discourses outside but, perhaps more importantly, historically conditions the way we negotiate our own locations as workers within the sex industry. This long term and complex process will have to continue.

Secondly, the daily oppression that is practised on us with the support of the dominant ideologies, have to be urgently and consistently confronted and resisted. We have to struggle to improve the conditions of our work and material quality of our lives and that can happen through our efforts towards us, sex workers gaining control over the

sex industry itself. We have started the process—today in many red light areas in cities, towns and villages, we sex workers have come to organise our own forums to create solidarity and collective strength among a larger community of prostitutes, forge a positive identity for ourselves as prostitutes and mark out a space for acting on our own behalf.

Male prostitutes are with us too

The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee was originally formed by women sex workers of Sonagachi and neighbouring red light areas, and initially for women prostitutes. However, within two years of our coming into existence male sex workers have come and joined us on their own initiative. These male sex workers provide sexual services to homosexual men primarily. As our society is strongly homophobic, and in fact penetrative sexual act between consensus adult men is still legally punishable the material and ideological status of male sex workers are even more precarious. We therefore had welcomed them in our midst as comrade in arms and sternly believe that their participation will make sex worker's movement truly representative and robust.

Sex workers' movement is going on—it has to go on. We believe the questions about sexuality that we are raising are relevant not only to us sex workers but to every men and women who question subordination of all kinds—within the society at large and also within themselves. This movement is for everyone who strives for an equal, just, equitable, oppression free and above all a happy social world. Sexuality like class and gender after all makes us what we are. To deny its importance is to accept an incomplete existence as human beings. Sexual inequality and control of sexuality engender and perpetuate many other inequalities and exploitation too. We refaced with situation to shake the roots of all such injustice through our movement. We have to win this battle and the war too—for a gender just, socially equitable, emotionally fulfilling, intellectually stimulating and exhilarating future for men, women and children.



Secretary's Report

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) welcomes all those who have responded to our call from within this state, and out side at national and international levels. We organised the state conference of sex workers in April '96 which was attended by over 1500 sex workers from 30 red light districts of West Bengal. Representative sex workers from Nepal and Bangladesh also attended the conference. Inspired by the overwhelming response and the need to further consolidate its activities of ensuring better living conditions for the sex workers, we are conducting the First National Conference of Sex Workers and your support and cooperation have guided us in giving shape to this conference.

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, formerly known as Mahila Samanwaya Committee (MSC), is a forum of sex workers representing about 30,000 sex workers (female, male and trans-sexuals) of different red light areas of West Bengal. DMSC, which came into existence in July, 1995, at present has 40 branches spreading all over the state. We have been successfully networking among the sex workers to unite. Our mission is to solve our day to day problems by building on our experiences and also protect our legal rights and fight social injustices against us. Apart from offering a forum to raise and discuss various issues related to our profession, this conference will provide an opportunity to share our experiences and plan strategies to fight injustices against us.

With the perspective of all round development of sex workers and their families, we have undertaken a few activities through active participation of our members.

- (a) Programmes or measures taken to restore the safety and security of sex workers in different red light districts
- i. In Tollygunj, our Committee organised a mass rally against an attempt of eviction without proper rehabilitation.
 - ii. In Khidderpur, a procession was followed by in a meeting to protest against the inhuman torture of a few sex workers by local "goondas". The culprits were compelled to admit their misdeeds.
 - iii. The secretary of a NGO in Central Calcutta experimented with unqualified AIDS vaccine on the hapless sex workers without

any permission from the Govt. They could venture such an unethical practice only because are sex workers !

iv. When the sex workers in Tollygunj were being harassed for large amounts of contributions during the Pujas, we demonstrated against it. Though the sex workers were threatened with dire consequences, the situation eased out gradually after the involvement of DMSC.

v. Whenever the police conduct largescale raids in Sonagachi and other red light areas, we get together to protest against this persecution by organising rallies.

vi. We protested against the inhuman beating of the children of sex workers at a non-Govt. home at Banunagachi, Barasat. We also appealed to the Ministry of Social Welfare to arrange for Govt. run homes for proper rearing of our children.

(b) Programmes organised to improve the working and living condition of sex workers and their family members :

i. A centre was opened in Rambagan on 7 September '95. The 'Centre for Counselling and Social Support' is providing counselling and support services to sex workers in the Sonagachi and Rambagan areas.

ii. On 16 May, 1997, a health care centre was inaugurated at Domjur. Howrah by the Hon'ble Health Minister, Shri Partha Dey to help sex workers in this area avail better health care services from this centre.

iii. We have been organising 'Sit & Draw' programmes every year for the children of sex workers since 1995 to bring out their latent talents. Our committee also

organise sports programmes for these children in collaboration with other NGOs.

iv. Last year, we arranged to send about 100 children of sex workers in the age group of 6 to 10 yrs (both boys and girls) from different red light areas of West Bengal to boarding schools, where they are now being educated and brought up in a healthy and conducive environment.

v. We started the 'Positive Hot Line' in Dec '96 (on World AIDS Day) to provide medical care, legal aid and free counselling to HIV - positive people and their families to help them live positively and die with dignity.

(c) Other activities :

i. We are happy to inform you that our Committee is represented in the Steering Committee of West Bengal Sexual Health Project and STD/HIV Intervention Programme.

ii. DMSC became a member of the 'NGO AIDS Coalition' - a platform of NGOs working for the control of AIDS.

iii. We have been participating in the Calcutta Book Fairs and distributing our papers and publications to make general people aware of our conditions - for the last few years.

iv. Every year we observe World AIDS Day on the 1st December by organising rallies and other functions to spread awareness of AIDS.

v. We started the social marketing of condoms from 15 April, 1997 through our co-operative "Usha Multipurpose Co-operative Society Ltd" as a measure against prevention of STD/AIDS.

vi. A meeting with the intellectuals was organised in February, 1997 to discuss on issues related to sex workers' right to self determination.

vii. A seminar on "Prevention of Minor Girls in Sex Trade" was conducted at Sisir Mancha on 9 July, 1997.

viii. We also participated in the National Consultation on Exploitation of Children in Prostitution, held in Goa.

ix. We celebrated International Women's Day on 8 March with great enthusiasm.

x. We participated in the 4th International Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific held in Manila in October, 1997.

xi. India will be the secretariat of the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers.

We would like to discuss strategies to adopt work plans during the conference on issues like :

- i. Sex workers, rightful position in the society as a worker.
- ii. Self regulatory Board of sex workers (on the line of Boards governing other professional practices like Bar Council, Medical Council etc.) constituted principally by the sex workers with representatives from relevant state and non-state bodies.

We wish to put on record the following performances of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee for the past one year (May '96 to October '97) :

1. DMSC arranged the State Conference on 29 - 30 of April, 1996 at the University Institute Hall in Calcutta. (In connection with this two symposiums were also arranged). The theme of this programme was Sex workers' Right to Self-Determination.

9. We worked as a Nodal Agency for Eastern region of 'Voices of Children - India campaign.' One child representative on behalf of DMSC was selected for participation in the conference 'The Rights of the children' at New York, USA from 6th to 13 November '96.

10. DMSC representatives participated in the Asian Conference on 'Child Exploitation and Abuse' at Great Eastern Hotel, Calcutta, from 25th to 27th November '96.

11. On 27 November '96, DMSC in collaboration with other NGOs opened the 'Positive Hot Line' with a dial number 533-3003. This 'Hot line' provides medical, legal and social support to HIV-positive people and their family members throughout the state of West Bengal.

12. On 24 December '96, city's first condom vending machine was installed at Sonagachi (the biggest red light area of West Bengal) by DMSC in collaboration with Family Planning Association of India and a local youth club Swapan Smriti Sangha.

13. DMSC organised a two-day residential training programme on 'Combating AIDS targeting the milieu of Negotiation' on 28 & 29 December '96 in Calcutta.

14. DMSC organised a seminar on 'Rights of Sex workers' at Jadavpur.

15. DMSC members attended the Training of Advanced Sex works, at Yuba Bharati Krirangan, Salt Lake, 19-21 January '97, organised by STD/HIV Intervention Programme.

16. The Burdwan District Conference was held at Pursuri, on 26th January '97.

17. DMSC participated in the Calcutta Book Fair from 29th January '97 in collaboration with SHIP.

18. The DMSC representatives attended the Orientation workshop of Positive Hot Line on 17 February '97.

19. On 23 February '97 DMSC organised a 'Sit and Draw' contest for the children of sex workers.

20. DMSC representatives participated in the meeting arranged by NGO-AIDS Coalition on 24 February '97 for the first time. Later, they were considered as regular members of NGO-AIDS Coalition.

21. We organised a Residential Training Programme for Sex workers at Yuba Bharati Krirangan from 25 - 27 February '97 (supported by VHAI).

22. DMSC members attended the workshop on 'Human Rights Education' organised by SLARTC on 1st and 2nd March '97.

23. The different branch offices of DMSC in Calcutta and Howrah (West Bengal) observed Women's Day on 8th March '97.

24. The secretary of DMSC attended the 1st International Conference on Prostitution at Los Angeles, California, USA, organised by Coyote La, Centre for Sex Research and Northridge University, from 13th to 18th March '97.

25. Participation in The Third Song and Dance Festival at New Delhi on 31st March organised by Guria, brought home the first prize for DMSC.

26. The first Health Care Centre by DMSC was inaugurated at Domjur, Howrah (West Bengal), on 16th May '97.

27. DMSC participated in the 'Babu-Meet' at Shibpur Botanical Gardens, on 22nd June '97 organised by SHIP.

28. Seminar on 'Prevention of Entry of Minor Girls in Sex Trade' at Sisir Mancha on 9 July '97 was organised by DMSC.

29. DMSC took part in the two-day workshop (23rd & 24th July '97) on 'National Consultation on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Goa, organised by National Commission for Women.
30. A team of DMSC members along with the SHIP staff went to Bangladesh for exchange and exposure visit to different projects in that Country, from 24th to 31st July '97.
31. DMSC representatives have undertaken networking among different RLAs in the districts of West Bengal, where units of DMSC have also been formed. Some of these places are Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Siliguri, Alipurduar, Seoraphuli, Uluberia, Andal, Nahaati, Baranagar, Budge Budge, Baruijur, etc.
32. The Secretary and President of DMSC presented themselves in the '4th International Conference on AIDS in Asia and The Pacific' in Manila, Philippines from 25 to 29 October '97.
Looking forward to a more fruitful future to come, I thank you again for your support and empathy.
14 November, 1997
Calcutta
Secretary
Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee

First National Conference of Sex Workers

Organised by **Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee**
14 - 16 November, 1997 at Calcutta

Advisory Committee (Policy):

Joint Chairpersons : Mrs Romola Chakravorty, Dr Smarajit Jana

Ex-Officio Secretary : Ms Mala Singh

Members :

Ms Anjali Gopalan, Ms Madhu Deshmukh, Ms Geeta Sethi,
Ms Susheela Kaushik, Dr I. S. Gillhada, Dr Gouripada Dutta,
Ms Anita Agnihotri, Ms Nandinee Bandopadhyay,
Mr Tarun Dutta, Mr Aloke Mukhopadhyay, Dorris D'Cruz - Grote

Advisory Committee (Programme):

Joint Chairpersons : Dr Arati Basu (Sengupta), Mr Manabendra Mondal

Ex-Officio Secretary : Ms Sadhana Mukherjee

Members :

Ms Mandira Dey, Ms Bidyuparna Gupta, Dr Chanchala Samaddar,
Mr Tushtar Bhattacharya, Dr Debapriya Mallik, Ms Sarita Chopra,
Mr Arup Dey, Ms Sujita Biswas, Dr Abhijit Mitra, Dr Sujit Das



First National Conference of Sex Workers
Organised by : **Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee**
At : Yuba Bharati Kirangan (Salt Lake Stadium), Calcutta
On : 14 - 16 November, 1997

Programme

14. 11. 97, Friday (Day One)

- 8 a.m.
9 a.m.
9.15 a.m. - 1.00 p.m.
1.00 - 2.30 p.m.
2.30 - 3.15 p.m.
3.15 - 5.30 p.m.
5.30 - 6.00 p.m.
6.00 - 8.00 p.m.
8.30 - 10.30 p.m.
- 8 a.m.
9 a.m.
9.15 a.m. - 1.00 p.m.
1.00 - 2.30 p.m.
2.30 - 3.15 p.m.
3.15 - 5.30 p.m.
5.30 - 6.00 p.m.
6.00 - 8.00 p.m.
8.30 - 10.30 p.m.
- Rally from Phoolbagan to Stadium
Flag Hoisting /Registration
Inaugural session (includes march past, release of souvenir, speeches, etc.)
Lunch
1st Plenary
"Sex, sexuality, sex work - dogma, dilemma & dichotomy"
Round table discussion in 2 tracks in 4 parallel groups
"Sex workers' right to self-determination is a struggle for equality"
"Sex work is real work, We demand workers' rights"
Tea
Cultural Programmes : Dance drama, music, classical dance, video shows etc.
Dinner

15. 11. 97, Saturday (Day Two)

- 7.00 a.m.
8.00 a.m. onwards
8.30 - 9.15 a.m.
9.15 a.m. - 1.00 p.m.
- Breakfast
Registration
2nd Plenary
"Criminalisation of prostitution - a play to protect patriarchy"
Symposium in 4 parallel tracks
"Comprehensive development is the basis of AIDS control programme"
"The central issue of AIDS control is restoration of Human Rights"

"Empowering sex workers to combat AIDS"
"Gender perspective of AIDS & STDs"

1.00 - 2.30 p.m.
2.30 - 5.30 p.m.
5.30 - 6.00 p.m.
6.00 - 8.00 p.m.
8.30 - 10.30 p.m.

Lunch
Symposium continued
Tea

Cultural Programmes : Drama by Komal Gandhar - (the cultural wing of DMSC)

Dinner

16. 11. 97, Sunday (Day Three)

7.00 a.m.
Breakfast

8.30 - 9.15 p.m.
3rd Plenary

Topic :
"Sex work, socialism & social indoctrination"

9.15 - 1.00 p.m.
Group discussion in 2 tracks in 4 parallel groups

Topics :
"Self regulatory Board of sex workers"

"National & International networking among the sex workers"

1.30 - 3.00 p.m.
Lunch

3.00 - 4.30 p.m.
Sharing of experiences among the sex workers

4.30 - 5.30 p.m.
Closing ceremony

Venue : Yuba Bharati Kirangan, Salt Lake, Calcutta, West Bengal, India

Sex Work Is Real Work
We Demand Workers' Rights



World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights

International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights

Two axis is for decim, it sounds like they do view it as work, just dont wante intervention

Law

Decriminalize all aspect of adult prostitution resulting from individual decision. *Decriminalize* prostitution and regulate third parties according to standard business codes. It must be noted that existing standard business codes allow abuse of prostitutes. Therefore, special clauses must be included to prevent the abuse and stigmatization of prostitutes (self-employed and other). Enforce existing criminal laws against fraud, coercion, violence, child sexual abuse, child labour, rape and racism everywhere and across national boundaries, whether or not in the context of prostitution. *Eradicate* laws that can be interpreted to deny freedom of association or freedom to travel to prostitutes within and between countries. Prostitutes have the right to a private life.

Human Rights

Guarantee prostitutes all human rights and civil liberties, including the freedom of speech, travel, immigration, work, marriage and motherhood and the right to unemployment insurance, health insurance and housing. Grant asylum to anyone denied human rights on the basis of a 'crime of status', be it prostitution or homosexuality.

Working Conditions

There should be no law which implies systematic zoning of prostitution. Prostitutes should have the freedom to choose their place of work and residence. It is essential that prostitutes can provide their services under the conditions that are absolutely determined by themselves and no-one else. There should be a committee to insure the protection of the rights of prostitutes and to whom prostitutes can address their complaints. This committee must be

comprised of prostitutes and other professionals, like lawyers and supporters. There should be no law discriminating against prostitutes associating and working collectively in order to acquire a high degree of personal security.

Health

All women and men should be educated to have periodical health screening for sexually transmitted diseases. Since health checks have historically been used to control and stigmatize prostitutes, and since adult prostitutes are generally even more aware of sexual health care than others, mandatory checks for prostitutes are unacceptable unless they are mandatory for all sexually active people.

Services

Employment, counselling, legal and housing services for runaway children should be funded in order to prevent child prostitution and to promote child well-being and opportunity.

Prostitutes must have the same social benefits as all other citizens according to the different regulations in different countries. Shelters and services for working prostitutes and re-training programs for prostitutes wishing to leave the life should be funded.

Taxes

No special taxes should be levied on prostitutes or prostitute businesses. Prostitutes should pay regular taxes on the same basis as other independent contractors and employers, and should receive the same benefits.

Public Opinion

Support educational programs to change social attitudes which stigmatize and discriminate against prostitutes and ex-prostitutes of any race, gender or nationality. Develop education programs which help the public to understand that the customer plays a crucial role in the prostitution phenomenon, this role being generally ignored. The customer, like the prostitute, should not, however, be criminalized or condemned on a moral basis. We are in solidarity with all workers in the sex industry.

Organization

Organization of prostitutes and ex-prostitutes should be supported to ensure further implementation of the above charter.

Source: First World Women's Congress, Amsterdam 1985



Statement of the Asia/Pacific Sex Workers' Network

We call on the delegates to the 4th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific, the steering committee of the 5th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific in Malaysia, and the upcoming 12th World AIDS Conference, 28 June - 3 July 1998 in Geneva to:

1. Recognise that sex work is an occupation.
 2. Acknowledge that sex workers are female, transgender and male.
 3. Accept that it is the unsafe conditions at work, rather than sex work itself, that causes risk of HIV infection and sexually transmissible diseases (STDs).
 4. Recognise and address the issue of police harassment of sex workers and police abuse of power as crucial factors in creating unsafe work environments which increase sex workers' risk of HIV and STD infection.
 5. Involve sex worker (female, transgender and male) representation at future international and regional conferences on AIDS as planners, delegates and presenters at all forums relating to sex work.
 6. Ensure sex workers can participate at international and regional conferences on AIDS by protecting sex worker's rights to travel.
- This network urges the international agencies and funding agencies working on the issue of HIV/AIDS to promote the establishment of programs, support existing programs and commit funds to programs which:
1. Provide education for sex workers, by sex workers, of their rights under existing laws in case of discrimination, harassment, arrest, rape, assault and all other forms of abuse by government authorities, including law enforcement agencies.
 2. Provide legal assistance, unconditionally, for sex workers who experience any of the above violations by any one, including the authorities.
 3. Support sex workers' to maintain and/or establish programs which improve police understanding of sex workers conditions and issues, and which will stop such abuse of the rights of sex workers.
 4. Assist in the documentation of abuse by police and authorities and pressure governments and authorities to stop these violations.
 5. Ensure sex workers have safe and confidential access to safer sex products, health care and medication in their country of work, equal to workers in other occupations, irrespective of their legal status.
 6. Ensure that testing for HIV is not a mandatory requirement of work, and that all testing is voluntary, confidential and includes pre and post test counselling.
 7. Support the ongoing need to train and educate clients and sex workers in the Asia Pacific region to negotiate safer sex.



AWHRC Statement

Asia-Pacific Consultation on Prostitution

Bangkok, Thailand

Activists, sex workers, human rights activists, attorneys and academics working directly with women in prostitution joined together to support the rights of women in prostitution in the Asia-Pacific region, to develop analysis as well as strategies for advocacy and action at various levels.

Patriarchy has long defined and regulated the lives of women. More specifically, the contemporary reality of globalisation and economic liberalisation have also come to define and regulate the lives of women in countries of the South and in particular of the Asia-Pacific region. As a result, the traditional subsistence patterns of communities have been disrupted adversely affecting the lives of many women and creating conditions under which large numbers of women are marginalised and exploited. Poverty is no longer merely an issue of absolute deprivation or inability to sustain oneself, but is an intensification of a sense of powerlessness on the part of individuals and communities and their growing inability to control their lives and futures.

Against this background, a large number of women find themselves working in the sex industry, either within countries of the Asia-Pacific region or in countries of the industrialised world. On account of the fact that women's reproductive labour within the patriarchal sexual division of labour has not been historically recognised, much of women's work in the domestic and reproductive spheres has been invisible and devalued. As such there is an urgent need to recognise the reproductive labour of women as work in various sites.

This Forum defines all labour performed by women in the sex industry as work and recognises women in prostitution as workers. And hence, prostitution, by definition, is recognised as work. The acceptance and recognition of prostitution as work is to recognise and validate the reality of women who are working in prostitution.

There is a need to make a distinction between prostitution and trafficking. Sex work per se is not exploitation. The element of abuse, violence and criminality in prostitution, particularly vis-a-vis trafficking, is the problem. The sex industry is a large and profitable industry in the Asia-Pacific region. However, having no rights as workers, women in

the sex industry see little of the profit and encounter a majority of the risk and abuse.

All state laws on prostitution in the Asia-Pacific region contribute to women's powerlessness because they fail to respect the human dignity and agency of women in the sex industry. The laws are often used as repressive tools by both the law enforcement machinery and traffickers to abuse and exploit women working in prostitution.

Patriarchal biases and double-standards of society stigmatise women in prostitution and justify the exploitation of women for huge profits. Society's stigmatisation of women in prostitution as immoral and evil women pits "good" women against "bad" deterring all women from recognising their common vulnerability and the manner in which they... are actually or potentially labeled as "whores". This hinders women from working together in solidarity for the rights of all women in general and of women in prostitution in particular. Stigmatisation of women working in prostitution has kept their legitimate concerns, including situations of abuse, in the shadows, away from the attention of mainstream human rights organisations, feminist groups and society in general.

We recognise that women working in prostitution come from very diverse backgrounds and thus do not constitute a homogenous group.

We deplore the failure of our governments to protect and empower women in prostitution. We hold our governments accountable for ignoring the abuses and exploitative conditions under, which women must work in the sex industry.

We hold our governments accountable for failing to recognise the rights of all women to work under safe and humane conditions. Our governments have one set of policies for workers at the centre of society and another for those at the margins. Having recognised prostitution as work and women within prostitution as workers we seek the decriminalisation of prostitutes as workers and of prostitution as a site of work.

Governments should apply and enforce existing labour, occupation and safety laws to the

sex industry. They should not create any regulations stigmatising the sex industry as special and, if it is necessary to create new regulations to protect the women, governments should only do so in consultation with the women themselves in order to ensure that the new regulations do not become weapons of control and coercion.

In addressing the issue of prostitution, space must be created by all organisations (government and nongovernment) for women in prostitution to voice their needs and concerns, and to formulate their own agendas in relation to their work.

Criminal laws on rape, battery, involuntary servitude, debt-bondage, false imprisonment, kidnapping, abduction, deception, coercion and exploitation must be vigorously enforced to combat abuse, forced labour and slavery-like practices to safeguard the rights of women working in prostitution.

While using the international Human Rights framework to combat the systemic and on-going violation of rights of sex workers, we recognise the need to explore specific socio-cultural frameworks within the Asia-Pacific region for equivalent idioms and terminology to capture the spirit of the Human Rights and social justice discourse.

Feminists need to forge strong alliances with women in prostitution to combat abuse within the 'sex industry', devaluation and division of women, and to strengthen the rights of all women.

Alliances need to be built with other segments in society to further the struggles of women in prostitution. These segments need to be concretely identified and strategies for alliance building formulated. The mandate to erase the stigmatisation of women engaged in prostitution, and to have their full dignity, integrity and rights recognised as workers and citizens of the civil society, should form the core of the campaign of the broader alliance.

February 17-18, 1997

Reprinted from *Asian Women's*



Redefining Prostitution as Sex Work on the International Agenda¹

Jo Bindman (Anti-Slavery International)

Sex workers, usually referred to as prostitutes, have occupied an anomalous position in societies throughout history. Prostitutes are generally regarded as a social category, as women who do not adhere to sexual and other behavioural norms; pitied or despised, they are excluded from mainstream society, their lowly and marginal position analogous to that of a low caste or minority ethnic group. Outcast status denies them whatever international, national or customary protection from abuse is available to others as citizens, women or workers.² This social exclusion renders the prostitute vulnerable to exploitation.

The designation of prostitution as a special human rights issue, a violation in itself, emphasises the distinction between prostitution and other forms of female or low-status labour, such as cleaning or food-serving, however exploitative they are. It thus reinforces the marginal, and therefore vulnerable, position of the women and men involved in prostitution. By dismissing the entire sex industry as abusive, it also obscures the particular problems and violations of international norms within the industry which are of concern to sex workers.

The lack of international and local protection renders sex workers vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace, and to harassment or violence at the hands of employers, law enforcement officials, clients and the public. The need for worker protection, including occupational health and safety provisions, is of particular relevance in the current context of HIV/AIDS. Sex workers without rights in their place of work are uniquely vulnerable to infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, as they routinely lack the information, materials or authority to protect themselves and their clients.

This report is intended as a preliminary step in the process of ending the exclusion of sex workers. By looking at commercial sex as work, and at the conditions under which that work is performed, sex workers can be included and protected under the existing instruments which aim to protect all workers in a general way, all persons from violence, children from sexual exploitation, and women from discrimination. The focus of the report is on how much sex workers have in common with other people and workers, not on how they differ. This report demonstrates that the social discrimination faced by sex workers and the problems they face in their working lives are not, in general, unique. Rather, their experience resembles

the experience of other persons and workers. An examination of international human rights and labour standards reveals that most issues of concern to sex workers could be subject to the international instruments already developed to protect the rights of other. This approach contrasts with the historic treatment of prostitution at international level.

Prostitution on the International Agenda : the 'Trafficking' Framework

The earliest definitions of 'trafficking' were used to distinguish the 'innocent' woman, who found herself in the sex industry as a result of abduction or deceit, from the ordinary prostitute. This was to allow the participation in the treaties about 'trafficking' of the many national governments which permitted highly regulated forms of prostitution.

Between 1895 and 1949 there were seven successive international agreements on the issue, each with its own different definition.³ The definitions were all variations on the themes of : prostitution, recruitment into prostitution, the issue of coercion and the validity of consent, and movement across frontiers. All agreements shared the basic themes of trying to protect women and children from engagement in prostitution, and from prosecution if already in prostitution, and the criminalisation of 'third parties', anyone recruiting for or profiting from prostitution. These themes derive from the 'Abolitionist' approach to prostitution, which gained ground throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

The Abolitionist approach declares that the institution of prostitution itself constitutes a violation of human rights, akin to the institution of slavery (in fact the term 'Abolitionist' was originally used to describe campaigners against the transatlantic slave trade). As such, no person, even an adult, is believed to be able to give genuine consent to engaging in prostitution. Prostitution only persists through the efforts of procurers or pimps, the 'third parties', who induce a woman into prostitution, openly or by means of deceit and coercion, to exert her earnings from her. The Abolitionist approach requires governments to abolish prostitution through the penalisation of this 'third party', which profits from the transaction between prostitute and client. The

prostitute cannot be punished, as she is the victim of a process she does not control. Without the 'third party', it is believed that the institution of prostitution will wither away.

The United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949), which largely reflects the Abolitionist position, has been widely criticised and poorly ratified.⁴ There is no evidence that the Convention or other international and local sanctions have been effective either in eliminating the flow of women and men into the sex industry, or in curbing abuses within it. Meanwhile, in the years since 1949, prostitutes themselves and others have been redefining the problem, asserting that the abuses are neither inherent nor unique to prostitution, but the outcome of the stigmatisation of the prostitute.

The 1949 Convention has yet to be revised or replaced, but the discussion of 'trafficking' has arisen in other fora. In the 1990s, the UN Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, the European Commission and the International Organisation on Migration have been looking at 'Trafficking in Women'. In 1996 the work of Europoli's Drug Unit was extended to include 'Trafficking in Human Beings' and in 1997 the European Union has agreed Union-wide procedures for addressing 'Trafficking in Women for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation'. Meanwhile, the lack of an authoritative definition of the term 'trafficking' and its historical associations have led some commentators to reject the term completely.

The International Agenda today : prostitution and slavery

Un standards which refer to prostitution reflect the confusion still surrounding the issue. The 1949 Convention is placed alongside the Slavery Conventions for the consideration of the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery at the Un Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities. The very fact that a separate convention exists linking trafficking and prostitution indicates a confusion. Other processes considered under both the UN and International Labour Organizations Conventions

against slavery and forced labour are classified only according to means of control, for example debt bondage, rather than to activities performed. The 1949 Convention appears, moreover, to be fundamentally flawed. The world-wide investigation of 'Trafficking in Women' by the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) in 1996 examined the recruitment of female migrants and the conditions they experience in the sex industry and in the home. The problems they identified, such as limited opportunities for legal migration and lack of recourse to the authorities, are in no way addressed by the Convention, with its focus on repressing the 'third party'. In considering the institution of prostitution itself as the abuse, the opportunity to prevent human and labour rights violations has been missed. It is hoped that this report will be a step in an ongoing process to resolve this confusion.

At the 16th Session of the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery in 1991, the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, an Abolitionist group, declared that 'to be a prostitute was to be unconditionally sexually available to any male who bought the right to use a woman's body in whatever manner he chose'.⁵ The words 'unconditionally and in whatever manner he chose' imply the rights of ownership which have been a part of the international definition of slavery since the League of Nations Slavery Convention of 1926. This represents a fundamental misconception about what constitutes slavery and what prostitution.

Slavery is a distortion of the employer-employee relationship and is predicated upon an enduring relationship characterised by the employer's abuse of superior power in relation to the employee. Without this enduring power to prevent the employee's resistance or escape, slavery and slavery-like practices are not possible. Some sex work is conducted in the structure of employment. Employment relations in the sex industry, and the working conditions associated with them as in every other industry, can be more or less exploitative. The most exploitative relations in any industry are categorised as slavery and slavery-like practices. The 1926 Slavery Convention defines slavery as 'the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised'.

The commercial transaction between sex worker and client, however, is not characterised by employment relations. He is the customer for the service provided, not the employer, and the relationship contained in the commercial transaction is limited in time and scope. Within the sex worker-client transaction, consent is continually negotiated.⁶ The 'right of ownership' implied by 'unconditionally sexually available' and 'in whatever manner he chose' is not possible in this relationship. The sex worker has no reason to accept a particular client or to submit to acts to which she does not consent or to refrain from seeking redress in the case of assault by a client which she cannot resist, unless she is constrained by pressures from an employer or other authority, in whose power she remains.

Where an individual's ability to negotiate is constrained by another person, where another person has the power to decide which or how many clients she will service, and what services may be performed, or the consent of the individual is overridden in any direction, then indeed we find slavery. There is, moreover, no need to qualify the abuse that is slavery with terms such as 'sexual slavery' — the condition of slavery is itself violation enough under any circumstances.⁷

It is no coincidence that slavery and slavery-like practices are disproportionately associated with the sex industry. The sex industry exists on the margins of society, beyond the legal and customary restraint on commercial and social behaviour which regulate the mainstream, and out of sight of those not directly involved. Moreover, the labour force is overwhelmingly made up of persons — women and young persons, transgendered persons and men who have sex with men — whose ability to defend their rights and whose economic opportunities are already restricted in society, limiting their ability to resist exploitation. Those most vulnerable are the poor, who face exploitation in every industry. However, the fact that some sex workers are subject to conditions of slavery does not constitute a logical basis for claims that all sex work amounts to slavery.

Violations of Sex Workers' Rights

The research leading up to this report revealed that rather than facing slavery, most people working as prostitutes are subjected to abuses which are similar

in nature to those experienced by others working in low status jobs in the informal sector. Their predicament is made much worse, however, by the stigma and criminal charges widely attached to prostitution, which allow police and other officials to harass them without ever intervening to uphold their most elementary rights.

This means that even in the many countries where prostitution itself is not illegal, sex workers cannot secure the minimum basic standards which other workers have acquired as far as conditions of work or their personal safety are concerned. It also means that the police frequently fail to take action to help the significant minority among prostitutes who really are victims of slavery.

To ensure the protection of sex workers' rights, it may be necessary to challenge, on human rights grounds, the very principle of restricting the sex industry under criminal law. The argument that sex workers should be entitled to the free choice of work, or indeed any of the labour or human rights discussed here, is of course, void if the State does not choose to define prostitution as work, but simply as unlawful activity.

However, the concept of human rights established by the UN requires governments to restrict their actions according to principles of justice. The right of the state to legislate on sexual morality is under question in many societies, while the effect of anti-prostitution legislation, by limiting the organisation of prostitution and encouraging its association with organised crime, can be widely observed to have a detrimental effect on public order and the general welfare. The justice and legitimacy of penal restriction of the sex industry is not self-evident: the onus must be moved to States to defend or repeal such restriction.

Defining sex work as a form of labour

We propose the following definition of sex work: Negotiation and performance of sexual services for remuneration

- (i) with or without intervention by a third party
- (ii) where those services are advertised or generally recognised as available from a specific location

(iii) where the price of services reflects the pressures of supply and demand.

In this definition, 'negotiation' implies the rejection of specific clients or acts on an individual basis. Indiscriminate acceptance by the worker of all proposed transactions is not presumed — such acceptance would indicate the presence of coercion.

The location of sex work in the realm of personal services, combined with the legal sanctions associated with it, means that even under a 'tolerant' regime, such as in the Netherlands, it is likely to take place in the informal sector. There are difficulties associated with defining and regulating labour in the informal sector. In the case of sex work, the division between social and commercial contacts, between the public domain of labour and the purchase of services, and the private domain of sexual behaviour is not always clear. It is easy enough to identify sex work in a formal work setting, such as a brothel or flat, but less easy to separate sexual services provided within informal networks from sexual relation with multiple social contact where gifts are expected.

Human rights are universal, and no boundary need therefore be drawn to apply human rights standards. However, for the purpose of applying labour standards, a distinction must be made between private, or social, and public, or commercial, behaviour. We have chosen therefore to define sex work in the public domain by association with a public market place. The market place may be a publication or a physical location where services are advertised or generally known to be available, and transactions are based at least partially on a competitive price structure.

Conclusions

Sex workers face systematic discrimination throughout the world and are therefore at risk of a variety of abuses. These include police extortion and arbitrary detention, and other violations of their human and labour rights, which in some cases even amount to slavery, especially resulting from debt bondage or child servitude under Article 1, sections (a) and (d), of the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery. It is