



FORUM AGAINST OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

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PRESS RELEASE

“Sex Workers have Human Rights too”

Statement from feminists in response to Prajwala’s letter to the NHRC

Women’s rights activists and organisations; sex worker rights organisations and sex workers themselves are deeply disturbed by the letter by Ms Sunitha Krishnan and her organisation, Prajwala to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) which reduces sex workers merely to hapless victims of violence and not citizens entitled to rights. This letter is in response to NHRC’s recent advisory titled “Human Rights Advisory on Rights of Women in the Context of Covid19” which recommended that sex workers be recognised as informal workers in order that they are able to get worker benefits.

Thousands of concerned people 11428 have signed a statement which says that the myopic and moralistic objections in the letter to the NHRC advisory are a direct attack on the rights of vulnerable communities like sex workers in the context of COVID 19 – the biggest pandemic of our times and is violative of women’s rights at several levels.

The signatories are from 25 states more than 255 networks and organisations including Feminist organisations like Forum Against Oppression of Women, Gamana Mahila Samuha, Stree Mukti Sanghatana, ANANDI, MASUM, Sahyar, People’s movements like Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghatana, AIPWA, PUCL, NAPM, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, sex worker national networks like NNSW, AINSW, TAARAS Coalition, queer and trans organisations like LABIA, INFOSEM, NGO’s like Naz Foundation India Trust, Lawyers Collective, Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women, IPPF, IRAW -Asia Pacific and several community organisations and collectives. The individual signatories come from metro cities like Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, and small towns and villages like Nandurbar, Yadigirigutta and Alappuzha.

The signatories believe that the NHRC advisory rightly acknowledges those in sex work as workers and citizens entitled to welfare measures and access to schemes for migrant workers in these pandemic times. They emphasise that by reducing those in sex work merely to victims of sexual violence the letter from Prajwala divests them of basic rights and entitlements that fundamentally acknowledge that they are even human.

The statement emphasises that sex worker collectives are fighting exploitative practices like and the self-regulatory processes they have set up are – as acknowledged by the Supreme Court – far more effective in fighting trafficking and exploitation from within even while evolving alternative livelihoods for those women who want to opt out of sex work.

The signatories affirm that the autonomy and dignity of women be they sex workers or victims of sexual violence are non-negotiable in democratic societies and no organisation or individual can arrogate to themselves the authority to decide their destinies.

Finally the statement calls upon organisations like Prajwala to not view organisations of sex workers as adversaries, but instead offer solidarity and enable women who want to opt out of sex work to access training and opportunities to make and implement these choices in a non-judgmental atmosphere.

Please find attached the full statement along with the list of signatories for publication.

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