



Statement Déclaration

For immediate release

Également disponible en français

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL POLICY IS OPPORTUNITY FOR CANADA TO REFORM HARMFUL LAWS ON SEX WORK

May 26, 2016 — The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network applauds Amnesty International’s “State Obligations to Respect, Protect and Fulfil the Human Rights of Sex Workers,” released today, which calls for the removal of all laws and policies that make sex work a criminal offence, including those that prohibit selling, buying or facilitating sex work or living off its proceeds.

As Amnesty International notes, the criminalization of sex work forces sex workers to sell sex in unsafe conditions and contributes to the violence they experience, while limiting their access to health and support services as well as impeding their access to the police and criminal justice system in the event that they experience harm. Criminalization also denies sex workers access to labour rights that facilitate safe working conditions.

Amnesty International’s extensive research indicates, contrary to popular belief, that criminalizing sex work does not reduce trafficking. It is vital to distinguish trafficking in persons from sex work. The conflation of human trafficking with sex work in Canada has had a pernicious effect on sex workers, many of whom are subject to the constant threat of raids, detention and deportation as a result.

In Canada, the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* makes the purchase of sex a crime. However, as Amnesty International describes, criminalizing the purchase of sex merely forces sex workers to take increased risks when negotiating with potential clients because of pressure to conclude negotiations quickly and covertly. Similarly, criminalizing third parties in sex work, such as managers, security or drivers — as is the case in Canada — also undermines sex workers’ safety by forcing sex workers to work in isolation and by prohibiting the use of important security mechanisms.

Now is an historic opportunity for the Canadian government to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of sex workers. This requires meaningful consultation with sex workers and accommodating those sex workers who cannot be public about their work, as well as ensuring that Indigenous persons who sell sex, migrant sex workers who risk deportation, sex workers who use drugs, sex workers who live in poverty, and trans and Two-Spirit sex workers can participate in law reform without being exposed to further harms created by the stigma and discrimination associated with selling sex. We urge the Canadian government to heed Amnesty International’s call to decriminalize sex work and to repeal the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, end repressive “anti-trafficking” enforcement initiatives that increase violence towards migrant sex workers, and repeal other laws and policies that harm the health and safety of sex workers.

For more information:

Lauryn Kronick
Communications and Outreach Officer
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
+1 416 595-1666 ext. 236
lkronick@aidslaw.ca