

WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL SEX WORKER RIGHTS DAY, AND HOW DID IT START?

International Sex Worker Rights Day began in 2001 when over 25,000 sex workers gathered in India for a festival organized by a Calcutta-based group called Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (Unstoppable Women's Synthesis Committee). In 2002, Durbar invited organizations from around the world to join them in commemorating Sex Worker Rights Day on March 3rd.

Since 2002, sex workers and advocates around the world have organized protests, gatherings, film screenings, art shows, and lectures on and around March 3 to raise awareness about human rights abuses sex workers face. Sex worker organizing extends across the globe, with efforts aimed at demanding recognition of sex worker autonomy, freedom from criminalization and legal protection from violence and abuse.

Ultimately, March 3rd provides an opportunity to shine a spotlight on sex worker activism, resilience, community and strength, and away from salaciousness, violations and paternalism.

As the largest network of service providers to the victims of trafficking in the US we are dismayed to see the continued conflation of sex trafficking with sex work, and the ongoing confusion between buyers of sexual services and traffickers. We are concerned about the consequences of such tactics on sex workers and trafficking victims alike. The unintended consequences of these programs include increased isolation and vulnerability to violence and exploitation, as well as a deepening of the rift that prevents many trafficking victims from reaching out to law enforcement when they seek to escape their situation.

-THE FREEDOM NETWORK-USA

We are not ONLY "victims" or ONLY "empowered" - the reality of the sex trade is complicated and our lives don't fit into a box. Don't ignore our reality by assuming we are one or the other (we might be both or neither - let us define how we view our lives.

-YWEP & DIFFERENT AVENUES

Criminalizing sex work, and conflating the buying or selling of consensual sex between adults with trafficking, aggravates the risks sex workers face. It also undermines the response to HIV, and perpetuates harmful patriarchal ideologies and gender stereotypes.

-WOMEN'S GLOBAL NETWORK FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Legislation that governs sex work without consulting sex workers and advocacy organizations such as SWOP, inevitably falls short of understanding the complex nature of the sex industry. Sex workers demand inclusion. NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!

-SWOP-SEATTLE

In environments where many aspects of sex work are criminalized - including, for example, soliciting, living off the earnings of a sex worker (the latter generally penalizing families and children of sex workers the most), or other provisions criminalizing third parties - sex workers face discrimination and stigma which undermine their human rights, including to liberty, security of the person, equality, and health.

-SANGRAM (INDIA)

SOME GLOBAL SEX WORKER RIGHTS GOALS

- Stop police harassment of and violence against sex workers.
- Ensure sex workers have access to safe, fair working conditions.
- Eliminate barriers to health care, housing, mainstream employment, and financial services.
- End stigma and discrimination.
- Identify and assist victims of sex trafficking and reduce vulnerabilities to trafficking.
- Increase economic, racial and gender equality to address economic compulsion.
- Stop harmful brothel raids, sting operations, and crackdowns on sex worker communities online and outdoors.
- Decriminalize sex work.

The decriminalization model is the only legal model for sex work that is based within a human rights framework....

Criminalization reinforces stigma against sex workers that facilitates continued violations of sex workers human rights.

-SWEAT & SISKONE (SOUTH AFRICA)

The key demand of the sex workers' movement in Burma, in Asia and all around the world is simple. We demand that sex work is recognized as work. But we have one other key demand, specific to certain parts of the women's movement. We demand that we are not treated as victims."

-KTHI WIN, (ASIA-PACIFIC - APNSW)

As we have repeatedly argued, regulating autonomous sex work and repealing any laws that indirectly encourage harassment and violence against us is the suitable way to respect and guarantee the human rights of those who voluntarily choose to engage in sex work.

-REDTRASEX (SOUTH AMERICA)

Even for those who believe that sex work is inherently harmful, criminalizing sex work creates harm in and of itself and only adds to the hardship of those working in the commercial sex industry. Criminalization creates stigma.

Criminalization allows authorities to harass, intimidate, and exploit sex workers and individuals who are profiled as sex workers. Criminalization entrenches people in poverty and forecloses the ability of people to leave the sex trade.

To protest the decriminalization of selling sex is to insist on further harming sex workers, including those trafficking victims who are forced into sex work.

-URBAN JUSTICE CENTER-NYC - SEX WORKERS PROJECT