

Consultation seeking views on UN Women approach to sex work, the sex trade and prostitution

Our organisations envision a society in which women's contribution to all aspects of life is recognised, rewarded and celebrated - in leadership, in care and in production; all women have self-confidence, freedom of choice, and freedom from violence and exploitation; and no woman or girl is left behind.

Question 1) The 2030 Agenda commits to universality, human rights and leaving nobody behind. How do you interpret these principles in relation to sex work/trade or prostitution?

While we welcome the will of UN Women to address the issue of prostitution and take a stand on the system of prostitution, we assume that UN Women's position will be mainly based on international agreed commitments, values and language, which include, but are not limited to, the 2030 Agenda.

The United Nations (UN) community expressed its views on prostitution in 1949, in the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. The Convention states that prostitution and traffic in persons are *"incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person"*. Adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in the same years as the International Bill of Human Rights, the 1949 Convention sets the ground for the international community's approach to prostitution and trafficking, the same way that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is used – still today – as the milestone instrument to protect fundamental human rights such as the right to freedom of opinion or the fight against torture.

In all other UN binding instruments – including CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, which are fundamental women's human rights instruments –, the language is based on the 1949 Convention, and refers to *"prostitution"* and *"exploitation of the prostitution of others"*. It is therefore crucial that all UN bodies respect and embody this language, which is directly linked to the core UN values of human dignity and leaving nobody behind.

Indeed, the protection of the dignity and worth of the human person is not only recognised as a fundamental principle by the UDHR but is also quoted as one of the *"ideals and common goals of all People whose Governments have gathered to create the United Nations"* in the Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations (1945).

In this context, all UN bodies and member states have an obligation, in order to promote and respect human dignity, to take action to eradicate the systems of prostitution. Doing so, the international community would ensure that trafficking for sexual exploitation is ended, since both phenomena are intrinsically linked, as stated by the 1949 Convention and recalled in the UN Palermo Protocol. Any policy which would normalise prostitution would go against human rights, and would leave behind all the victims of sex trafficking and prostitution.

We therefore hope that UN Women, in its positioning on prostitution, will build on the UNGA work and act as a guardian of the international human rights values and provisions. As the UN entity for

women's rights, it is crucial that UN Women plays such a critical role, towards member states and other UN agencies.

We believe it is important to mention here that the UN has developed an internal perspective on prostitution, which needs to be included in UN Women's analysis. In his Special Bulletin on "*Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse*", the UN Secretary General defines sexual abuse as any "*actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature under unequal or coercive conditions*". The UNSG Special Bulletin specifically targets and prohibits the purchase of a sexual intercourse by UN personnel: "*Exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex is prohibited*".

Language plays a key role and conveys values and vision for the world we want to live in. The women's movement expects all human rights to be implemented for all women and girls, and UN Women to address the system of prostitution with a vision of its role towards real equality between women and men.

Question 2) The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out to achieve gender equality and to empower all women and girls. The SDGs also include several targets pertinent to women's empowerment, such as

- a) reproductive rights**
- b) women's ownership of land and assets**
- c) building peaceful and inclusive societies**
- d) ending the trafficking of women**
- e) eliminating violence against women.**

How do you suggest that policies on sex work/trade/prostitution can promote such targets and objectives?

In February 2014, Members of the European Parliament adopted a resolution quoting the 1949 Convention and stating that "*prostitution and sexual exploitation are highly gendered issues and violations of human dignity, contrary to human rights principles, among which gender equality, and therefore contrary to the principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, including the goal and the principle of gender equality*". Besides promoting human dignity, policies should obviously also aim to realise all women's human rights, including equality between women and men.

The reality of prostitution, as shared by women in prostitution and survivors, to frontline and women's organisations, tells us that prostitution is a system of violence against women: it builds on the continuum of male violence and perpetuates the tolerance for such violence. A vast majority of women in prostitution have suffered from sexual abuse before entering the system, face violence including murder, while in prostitution, and have to live with the mental, physical and sexual consequences of prostitution – a sex act with no mutual desire. As survivor Rachel Moran says: "*what is bought and sold in prostitution is not sex. It is sexual abuse. Prostitution is the commercialisation of sexual abuse*".

The reality of the system of prostitution is also a reality of exploitation of vulnerabilities: women and girls, mainly from minorities or Indigenous communities or low castes or poorer countries. Policies

which trivialize prostitution as a choice, or which criminalise women in prostitution, always lead to leaving behind the most vulnerable and fostering gender inequality. Countries which have legalised pimping have seen an increase of sex trafficking, but no better standards for equality between women and men, women's security or social inclusion.

Empowering women and girls – an objective of the 2030 Agenda – seeks to free women and girls from the systems which perpetuate inequalities, the same way the abolitionist movement freed our societies from slavery. Youth organisations are concerned by the widespread rape culture, fostered by the commodification of women's bodies in all spheres of society. Such culture is sustained by the systems of prostitution, which normalise the idea of men's entitlement to women's bodies. We cannot realise sexual rights, women's participation, peace and security, if the international community turns a blind eye on the intrinsic links between prostitution and gender inequality.

Question 3) The sex trade is gendered. How best can we protect women in the trade from harm, violence, stigma and discrimination?

The sex trade must be understood as a system where many actors are involved, and which is intrinsically linked to the power dynamics of our societies. In this system, an overwhelming majority of women are bought and sold, by an overwhelming majority of men who are either sex buyers or pimps and traffickers. We face indeed a gendered phenomenon, which has to be understood in the framework of the gendered societies we live in, where power and decision-making are male dominated – including in the UN system.

Society is part of the system as it plays a role in supporting the sex trade or disrupting it. We strongly believe that public policies should not aim at mitigating the harm of a phenomenon, but at tackling its root causes and ending it. As said above, the system of prostitution, in all its forms (street prostitution, strip clubs, porn industry, escorting, in brothels, etc.), perpetuates violence against women and girls, and contributes to inequalities and discrimination for all women and girls, especially among the most vulnerable.

Harm, violence, stigma and discrimination are inherent to the system of prostitution, and cannot be reduced without ending the system itself. While harm reduction strategies are needed, they have to be part of a broader policy approach which targets prostitution as a demand-oriented market. Some countries have already implemented policies aiming to protect women and girls in and from prostitution: in Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Canada, Northern Ireland, and France, women in prostitution are not criminalized and are provided with social support and comprehensive exit programmes. Such policies address all actors of the system: they also provide quality education in formal and non-formal settings, they strongly condemn pimping and procuring (as requested by the 1949 Convention) as well as all forms of trafficking; and they criminalise the purchase of sex as a matter of social justice and a strategic way to disrupt the market.

No women would be harmed, abused, violated, stigmatised and discriminated in the sex trade if men did not pay for sex acts. If UN Women wants to be the 'global champion for gender equality', it has to provide a visionary position to empower all women and girls and end all forms of domination including the system of prostitution.

Signatories:

	1,6 million club for women's health	Sweden
	1000 Möjligheter / Foundation 1000 Opportunities	Sweden
	8th of March Initiative	Denmark
	Abolish Prostitution Now	Germany
5	Abolition2014	Germany
	Action Against Violence and Exploitation, Inc. (ACTVE)	International
	AFCJ - Association Française des Femmes des Carrières Juridiques	France
	African Women's Association (Afrikanische Frauenorganisation)	Austria
	Alliance for Parity Democracy (ADP) Aliança para a Democracia Paritária	Portugal
10	Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance	Bulgaria
	Amicale du Nid	France
	Anti Porn Men Project	UK
	Aperio	Czech Rep
	Apne Aap International	India
15	Apne Aap Women Worldwide	India
	Aretusa	International
	Asociación POR TI MUJER	Spain
	Association "Kauno moterų linija" (Kaunas Women' Help Line"	Lithuania
	Association for Democracy in Africa	Austria
20	Association for equal opportunities 'Ezerka' – Struga	Macedonia
	Association for improving the status of women in the contemporary social processes in Macedonia, "Women's action"	Macedonia
	Association for nonviolent communication	Slovenia
	Association for the Advancement of Portuguese Gypsy Women (AMUCIP) Associação para o Desenvolvimento das Mulheres Ciganas Portuguesas	Portugal
	Association for Women in Cape Verdean Diaspora in Portugal (AMCDP) Associação de Mulheres Caboverdeanas na Diáspora em Portugal	Portugal
25	Association Mén Non - Women of Sao Tome & Prince in Portugal Associação Mén Non - Associação de Mulheres de São Tomé e Príncipe em Portugal	Portugal
	Association of Women Against Violence (AMCV) Associação de Mulheres Contra a Violência	Portugal
	Association of Women 21st Century Associação de Mulheres Séc. XXI	Portugal
	Association project to raise Associação projeto criar	Portugal
	Association Women without Borders Associação Mulheres Sem Fronteiras	Portugal
30	Associazione IROKO Onlus	Italy
	Autonomous Women's Centre	Serbia
	Bagong Kamalayan Survivors Group	Philippines
	Be Free cooperativa	Italy
	BGRF - Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation	Bulgaria
35	Birth Centre "U čápa"	Czech Republic
	BPW Sweden (Business and Professional Women Sweden)	Sweden
	Buklod ng Kababaihan (Prostitution Survivors)	Philippines
	Bulgarian Women's Lobby	Bulgaria
	Bündnis Stop Sexkauf	Germany
40	Bürgerinitiative gegen Bordell Marburg	Germany
	Care for Europe	International
	Caritas Lithuania	Lithuania
	CATW	International
	Cecym	Argentina
45	CEE Network for Gender Issues	Slovenia
	CELEM - Coordinadora Española para el lobby europeo de mujeres	Spain
	Center for Women War Victims ROSA	Croatia
	Center Women's Association	Sweden

	Centre for Women's Studies	Croatia
50	CFFB - Conseil des Femmes Francophones de Belgique	Belgium
	Choisir la cause des femmes	France
	CLEF - Coordination française pour le LEF	France
	CLES - Concertation pour la Lutte contre l'exploitation sexuelle	Québec
	CNDIFF	France
55	CNFL - Conseil National des Femmes du Luxembourg	Luxembourg
	Coalition Against Trafficking in Women - Asia Pacific	International
	Collectif de Pratiques et de Réflexions Féministes « Ruptures »	France
	Collectif Droits des Femmes	France
	Collectif Midi-Pyrénées pour les droits des femmes	France
60	Comisión para la investigación de los malos tratos a mujeres	Spain
	Comité Permanent de Liaison des associations abolitionnistes	France
	Community safety and Mediation Center	Romania
	Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd	International
	Coolabora Coolabora	Portugal
65	Cooperative SEIES Cooperativa SEIES	Portugal
	Coordination luxembourgeoise du LEF	Luxembourg
	Coordination of Greek Women's NGOs for the EWL	Greece
	CRIFIP - Centre de recherches internationales et de formation sur l'inceste et la pédocriminalité	France
	Cyprus Women's Lobby	Cyprus
70	Czech Doula Association	Czech Republic
	Danish Women's Society	Denmark
	Deep Green Resistance	UK
	Demetra	Bulgaria
	Development through Active women Networking foundation (DAWN Foundation)	Philippines
75	Doras Luimni	Ireland
	Dovetail Initiative	UK
	Eaves	UK
	EDO WOMEN DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE	Nigeria
	Eisti Estonia	Estonia
80	Ekaterina Karavelova Association	Bulgaria
	EMMA	Germany
	ENoMW - European Network of Migrant Women	International
	EOS - Association of Studies, Cooperation and Development EOS - Associação de Estudos, Cooperação e Desenvolvimento	Portugal
	Equality Now	International
85	Equality Question – Ass. for Social Inovation Questão de Igualdade - Associação para a Inovação Social	Portugal
	Equipes d'Action contre le proxénétisme	France
	Espace Simone de Beauvoir	France
	Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable	Estonia
	European women lawyers association	International
90	EVAW - End Violence against Women Coalition	UK
	EWL - European Women's Lobby	International
	Exit Kollegiet, Reden International	Denmark
	Exit Prostitution Finland	Finland
	FEL - feminist and left	Belgium
95	Feminist Initiative	Sweden
	Femmes au centre	France
	Femmes en détresse	Luxembourg
	Femmes en résistance	France
	Femmes et Santé	Belgium
100	Femmes libres	France
	Femmes pour le dire, Femmes pour agir	France
	Femmes solidaires	France

	Fier	Netherlands
	FiLia	UK
105	Fokus	Norway
	Fondation Scelles	France
	Forum – Associazione Donne Giuriste	Italy
	Forum 50%	Czech Rep
	Forum Femmes Méditerranée	France
110	Foundation Caring for the Future Fundação Cuidar o Futuro	Portugal
	Fourth Wave Edinburgh Feminist Activists	UK
	FPS - Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes	Belgium
	Fredrika Bremer Association	Sweden
	Freethem	Austria
115	Freethem	Sweden
	Gender Project for Bulgaria Foundation	Bulgaria
	Girls of Odivelas - Association Meninas de Odivelas – Associação	Portugal
	Gredi Dona	Spain
	Help in need	Czech Republic
120	Hibiscus Initiatives	UK
	Human Right office of Iceland	Iceland
	Hungarian Women's Lobby	Hungary
	ICI - Immigrant Council of Ireland	Ireland
	Imkaan	UK
125	Initiative Féministe Euroméditerranéenne IFE-EFI	International
	Initiative Stopp Sexkauf	Austria
	Institute for social creativity	Slovenia
	isala	Belgium
	Karo	Germany
130	KFUKS Sociale Arbejde / YWCIA Social Work	Denmark
	Klaipeda social and psychological services center	Lithuania
	KOFRA - Kommunikationszentrum für Frauen	Germany
	Kvennaráðgjöfin	Iceland
	Kvennfélagasamband Íslands	Iceland
135	Kvinnofronten (Women's Front)	Sweden
	Landersfrauenrat Baden-Wuerttemberg (51 members)	Germany
	L'Assemblée des Femmes Paris Ile-de-France	France
	Le Grand Chapitre Général Féminin de France	France
	Le monde à travers un regard	France
140	Le Monde selon les Femmes	Belgium
	LEF Italia	Italy
	L'Egalité c'est pas sorcier	France
	Les eFRONTÉ-e-s	France
	Les Moutons noirs	France
145	Libres Mariannes	France
	Ligue du Droit International des Femmes	France
	LISA Wiesbaden	Germany
	Lithuanian Women's Lobby	Lithuania
	London Abused Women's Centre	UK
150	Macedonian association of development and integration (MADI)	Macedonia
	Macedonian Women's Lobby	Macedonia
	Maisha e.V. African Women in Germany	Germany
	Manchester Feminist Network	UK
	Män för Jämställdhet Göteborg (Men for gender equality Goteborg)	Sweden
155	Marche Mondiale des Femmes 31	France
	Marche Mondiale des Femmes France	France
	Marta Center	Latvia
	MCWO - Malta Confederation of Women's Organisations	Malta
	MDM - Movimento Democrático de Mulheres	Portugal

160	Médicos del Mundo	Spain
	Mémoire traumatique et victimologie	France
	Men for Gender Equality	Sweden
	Men's Development Network	Ireland
	MIGS - Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies	Cyprus
165	Missing Persons' Family Support Center	Lithuania
	MONA Foundation for the Women of Hungary	Hungary
	MONIKA - Multicultural Women's Association	Finland
	Non-Aligned Women's Movement	Greece
	Nordic Model Now	UK
170	Mouvement du Nid	France
	Mouvement Jeunes Femmes	France
	Mouvement National LE CRI	France
	Naisasialiitto Unioni - Feminist Association Union	Finland
	National Board of Catholic Women	UK
175	Nätverket mot Traficking	Sweden
	NAWO - National Alliance of Women's Organisations	UK
	NAWO Youth	UK
	NCWI - National Women's Council of Ireland	Ireland
	Network for European Women's Lobby	Serbia
180	NEWW	Poland
	Nisa ul Haqq fi Bangsamoro	Philippines
	NIWEP - Northern Ireland Women's European Platform	UK
	Nordic Model Advocates	UK
	Nordic Model Now	UK
185	NVR - Nederlandstalige Vrouwenraad	Belgium
	NYTKIS - The Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations	Finland
	O Ninho	Portugal
	Object	UK
	OLF - Osez le Féminisme !	France
190	Organization of Turkish women in Macedonia "Derya"	Macedonia
	Organization of women "Radika"	Macedonia
	Organization of women of municipality Sveti Nikole	Macedonia
	Organization of women of Skopje	Macedonia
	PETRA Network of NGOs for the Prevention and Elimination of Trafficking in Women	Croatia
195	PEXESO Family Centre	Czech Rep
	Polish Women's Lobby	Poland
	Portuguese Association for Women's Rights in Pregnancy and Child Birth (APDMGP) Associação Portuguesa para os Direitos das Mulheres na Gravidez e no Parto	Portugal
	Portuguese Association of Women Lawyers Associação Portuguesa de Mulheres Juristas	Portugal
	Portuguese Network of Young People for Gender Equality (REDE) REDE Portuguesa de Jovens para a Igualdade entre Mulheres e Homens	Portugal
200	PpDM - Portuguese Platform for Women's Plataforma Portuguesa para os Direitos das Mulheres	Portugal
	Portuguese Women's Studies Association (APEM) APEM - Portuguese Association of Women's Studies	Portugal
	Projecto Tráfico de Mulheres - Romper Silêncios	Portugal
	RadFem Collective	UK
	Real Stars	Sweden
205	REFH - Réussir l'égalité femmes-hommes	France
	Regards de Femmes	France
	Renew Foundation	Philippines
	Research Centre of Women's Affairs	Greece
	Réseau Féministe « Ruptures »	France
210	Réseau méditerranéen contre la traite des femmes	International
	Resistenza Femminista	Italy
	Rights4Girls	USA
	Rights of Women	UK

	ROKS	Sweden
215	Romanian Women's Lobby	Romania
	ROSA Project	Norway
	Ruhama	Ireland
	Samaritana Transformation Ministries	Philippines
	Sanlaap	India
220	Scientists for a world without prostitution	Germany
	Scottish Women's Aid	UK
	Sisterhood is Global	International
	Sisters e.V.	Germany
	SKV - Sveriges Kvinnors Vänsterförbund	Sweden
225	Slovakian Women's Lobby	Slovakia
	Slovenian Women's Lobby	Slovenia
	Solidarité Femmes	France
	Solwodi	Germany
	SOS Help Line	Slovenia
230	Space Allies	Japan
	SPACE International	International
	Stigamot	Iceland
	Swedish Ecumenical Women's Council	Sweden
	Swedish Women's Lobby	Sweden
235	Talikala	Philippines
	Talita	Sweden
	Terre des Femmes	Germany
	The Nest Copenhagen	Denmark
	The Nest International	Denmark
240	The Nest Odense	Denmark
	The Nia project	UK
	The Swangroups	Denmark
	The Swedish Union of Soroptimist International	Sweden
	Turn Off the Red Light	Ireland
245	UK Feminista	UK
	UK Joint Committee on Women	UK
	Une femme, un toit	France
	UNIPA: Czech Association of Midwives	Czech Republic
	Université des Femmes	Belgium
250	Unizon	Sweden
	Verein feministischer Diskurs	Austria
	Vox Femina	France
	Wales assembly of women	UK
	W.O.M.E.N the organisation of women of foreign origin	Iceland
255	Women @ the well	UK
	WomanHealth	Philippines
	Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland?	UK
	Women's Council in Denmark	Denmark
	Women's Equality Network Wales	UK
260	Women's Front (Kvinnefronten)	Norway
	Women's Liberation Front	UK
	Women's Line	Finland
	Women's Network Croatia	Croatia
	Women's NGOs cooperation network	Latvia
265	Women's Rights Association of Iceland	Iceland
	Women's shelter of reykjavik	Iceland
	Women's Support Project	UK
	World March of Women	Philippines
	Youth Action	UK
270	Youth and Students Advancing Gender Equality	Philippines

	YWCA Ireland	Ireland
	zeroimpunity	International
	ZéroMacho	France
	Zonta Clubs de France	France