

**Consultation seeking views on UN Women approach to sex work, the sex trade and
prostitution
SUBMISSION
October 31, 2016**

We, the undersigned, aged from 18 to 68 years old, are surviving and are survivors of the sex trade, including prostitution, as well as survivor leaders in the movement to end violence and discrimination against women and girls. Collectively, we have experienced hundreds of years of abuse, violence, sexual violence, degradation, dehumanization as girls and women exploited in the sex trade, under the eyes of our respective governments. We were exploited and violated by sex buyers, pimps, traffickers and other others who bought us, sold us and profited from our exploitation, with impunity.

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?](#)

We are the women that the U.N., its agencies, governments and society have left behind, with impunity and at great risk to our lives. Many of our sisters around the world have perished in the sex trade, mostly unaccounted for in large part due to the low status our respective countries and cultures have assigned us. To answer your question, we can never, and will never, interpret these principles in relation to “sex work” as you posit, because what we endured at the hands of sex buyers, pimps, brothel owners, traffickers and our other exploiters was neither sex, nor work, but an endless stream of violence, degradation and dehumanization imposed on our bodies and minds.

Examining prostitution within the universality of human rights calls on UN Women to take stock of the respective histories of the U.N.’s member states and remember why the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international covenants were signed and ratified. Through these covenants, governments pledge to act as responsible members of an international community that strives to remedy the wrongs created by wars and conflict, violence and discrimination by those who have power over those who do not. Collectively, an overwhelming percentage of prostituted women and girls are Aboriginal, Indigenous, First Nations, or Native to their countries. We are African or of African descent; Latina or of Latin American descent; Asian or of Asian descent; minorities within our own countries, such as Roma or from “Scheduled Castes.” The almost universal colonization of Indigenous peoples had a doubly negative impact on the populations’ women and girls, who suffered the worst kinds of sexual violence and discrimination. If the goals of the 2030 Agenda are to leave no human being behind, then UN Women cannot ponder whether the sex trade is a viable form of employment in the lives of our sisters and daughters.

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?

The only policies that are viable in addressing prostitution within the women's rights framework is for governments to target the demand for prostitution by penalizing sex buyers; to provide comprehensive services to prostituted women and girls and offer them viable exit strategies to leave the sex trade. Prostitution and the targets listed in this question are wholly incompatible with each other and in fact, prostitution destroys every SDGs. Without fully addressing the prostitution of women and girls, we guarantee that the U.N. and its member states will never achieve full justice and rights for women.

It is impossible within the context of prostitution for women to exercise their full rights, to secure reproductive rights, to end the trafficking of women, eliminate violence against women, to secure justice and freedom from exploitation. Prostitution embodies violation and discrimination against women within the aspects of economy, politics, culture and gender. We know of no woman who has developed her full potential or built economic security through prostitution; the minute she is no longer bought, she is bereft of income with no financial security.

A "sex work" model gives state-sanctioned licenses to pimps, brothel owners and sex buyers, which is antithetical to human rights principles and the integrity of international law, including the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (the 1949 Convention), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol), to name just three conventions.

The 1949 Convention of 1949 articulates specifically that prostitution and trafficking and such slavery like practices "... are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person..." Article 6 of CEDAW states that " State Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women." Article 9.5 in the Palermo Protocol calls on State Parties to take measures to discourage the demand that fosters the exploitation of persons that lead to trafficking, meaning that any national or international policies that call for the decriminalization of sex buyers are in direct contravention of the Palermo Protocol.

We urge UN Women to analyze prostitution within these legal contexts, and within the scope of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as gender-based sexual abuse and exploitation.

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

The vast majority of prostituted persons everywhere are female, and in the cases of women, most have been prostituted and sex trafficked since childhood. Prostitution is by definition an exploitative system of unequal gender relations, which operates to subjugate and oppress women.

Many of us, as the undersigned, work in our communities providing front-line services to women and girls in prostitution. Regardless of our respective jurisdictions and legal frameworks governing prostitution, the harm, violence, stigma and discrimination are the same across the board for all prostituted women and girls. The factors that catapulted us into the sex trade are the ones that we see in the women and girls we serve: poverty, homelessness, childhood sexual violence or incest, racial or ethnic disenfranchisement, vulnerable after conflict or natural disasters, militarization of our regions, and always, an absolute absence of choice. Like us, these women and girls are bought, sold and used with impunity by adult men who are financially, socially and racially privileged in relation to them.

Our expertise shows that the best way to protect women bought and sold in the sex trade is to provide them with the services they urgently require: basic needs for their and their children's survival (food, housing, clothing, medical services, childcare) and tools to help them rebuild their lives (education and training, psychological or psychiatric treatment and counseling, substance abuse rehabilitation). Also critically important is to advocate for laws and policies that exonerate them from police arrest and criminal punishment and instead hold their sex buyers accountable for the irreparable harm they perpetrate.

Although we have rarely, if ever, come across a prostituted woman whose life experience did not include any of the vulnerability factors that are linked to prostitution, we could concede for purposes of this consultation that a microscopic minority might claim that prostitution was a free and clear choice. Our colleagues who work with victims of intimate partner violence might also encounter women who are not capable or ready, for whatever reason, to leave their batterers. In neither case should governments develop laws and policies that exonerate perpetrators because of the so-called choices of these women. Similarly, UN Women is charged with ensuring that governments uphold CEDAW and other conventions that protect the rights of women and girls. Taking a position that would lead to qualifying prostitution as a form of work would violate UN Women's mission and irreparably contradict the principles of the 2030 Agenda. The global, multi-dollar sex trade is linked to organised criminal networks that profit immensely and illegally from the sale of women and girls for sexual acts, and counting on sex buyers to sustain such incalculable profits.

UN Women's mission is to challenge gendered inequalities that violate the fundamental rights of women and girls, through prostitution, sexual exploitation, and sexual abuse. UN Women's role is to support a global women's and girls' rights movement dedicated to creating economic and social conditions and ensuring legal protections for women and girls in order to ensure that they never have to endure the suffering, violence and the denial of dignity that we survived. And if they tragically do, that they accede justice. Our answers here are a call to UN Women and the UN system as a whole to uphold international laws and human rights principles that will prevent and protect all women and girls, including those in prostitution and the sex trade at large.

Please send your input to consultation@unwomen.org by 16 October 2016 with the subject title "Written submission".

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103. Linda Oluoch, USA
104. Wilhelm Orly, Colombia
105. Sheira Osas, Maisha African Women in Germany, Nigeria
106. Lory Pabunag, Lawig Bubai, Philippines
107. Maria Paula Pachón, Colombia
108. Yenny Pachón, Colombia
109. Karen Pedraza, Colombia
110. Ana Laura Perez, Mexico
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121. Red de Jóvenes contra la Trata y la Demanda de la Prostitución en América Latina y el Caribe
122. Red de Sobrevivientes de la Trata y la Explotación Sexual en México “Las Golondrinas”
123. Renew Foundation Survivors, Philippines
124. Lucylyn F. Reyes, Buklod, Philippines
125. Norma Reyes, Buklod, Philippines
126. Mary Richards, Nigeria
127. Maribel Rodriguez, Colombia
128. Gioia Ruyi, Nigeria
129. Elizabeth Salgado, Colombia
130. Nancy Susi Sanchez, Mexico
131. Sonia Sanchez, Argentina
132. Myles Sanchez, Bagong Kamalayan, Philippines
133. Adelina Sejdini, stateless, formerly Albania
134. Sobrevivientes “Las Golondrinas”, Bolivia
135. Sobrevivientes “Las Golondrinas”, Colombia
136. Sobrevivientes “Las Golondrinas”, Paraguay
137. Sobrevivientes “Las Golondrinas”, Venezuela
138. Rose Sullivan, Canada

Survivors, Apne Aap, India

139. Aasha, Delhi
140. Aarti, Delhi
141. Afsana, Bihar
142. Amrita, Delhi
143. Anita, Delhi
144. Anisha, Delhi
145. Ansare, Delhi
146. Asha, Delhi
147. Bali, Delhi
148. Bharti, Delhi
149. Chasmo, Delhi
150. Deepmala, Delhi
151. Deepmala, Delhi
152. Dhanvash, Delhi
153. Dimple, Delhi
154. Ehanwanti, Delhi
155. Futkari, Bihar
156. Geeta, Delhi
157. Geeta, Delhi
158. Geeta, Delhi
159. Guddi, Delhi
160. Geeta, Delhi
161. Heena, Delhi
162. Jamila, Bihar
163. Jugni, Bihar
164. Junej, Delhi

165.Kajol, Delhi
166.Kajol, Delhi
167.Kareena, Delhi
168.Karina, Delhi
169.Karina, Delhi
170.Karishma, Delhi
171.Kaseema, Delhi
172.Kushma, Delhi
173.Madhu, Delhi
174.Mahi, Delhi
175.Manisha, Delhi
176.Manli, Delhi
177.Mariyam, Bihar
178.Maya, Delhi
179.Maya, Delhi
180.Meenakshi, Delhi
181.Monika, Delhi
182.Muskan, Delhi
183.Naina, Bihar
184.Neelam, Delhi
185.Neelam, Delhi
186.Neelam, Delhi
187.Nirmala, Delhi
188.Nishita, Delhi
189.Nishita, Delhi
190.Palavi, Delhi
191.Pallavi, Delhi
192.Pinki, Delhi
193.Pooja, Delhi
194.Pooja, Delhi
195.Pooja, Delhi
196.Preeti, Delhi
197.Priti, Delhi
198.Priya, Delhi
199.Priya, Delhi
200.Puja, Delhi
201.Raini, Delhi
202.Rakesha, Delhi
203.Rani, Delhi
204.Ravita, Delhi
205.Reena, Delhi
206.Raveena, Delhi
207.Reena, Delhi
208.Reeta, Delhi
209.Rekha, Delhi
210.Ruksana, Bihar
211.Ruksana, Bihar

212.Sabnam, Bihar
213.Saiba, Delhi
214.Saiba, Delhi
215.Sakeena, Delhi
216.Sakina, Delhi
217.Salma, Delhi
218.Salma, Delhi
219.Sameena, Delhi
220.Sangita, Delhi
221.Santosh, Delhi
222.Sapna, Delhi
223.Sapna, Bihar
224.Savita Delhi
225.Savita, Delhi
226.Sarita, Delhi
227.Seema, Delhi
228.Shamsina, Bihar
229.Sheela,Delhi
230.Shobha, Delhi
231.Sima, Delhi
232.Sonam, Delhi
233.Sulakha, Delhi
234.Sunita, Delhi
235.Taniya, Delhi
236.Tharun, Bihar
237.Vikesh, Delhi
238.Vikesh, Delhi
239.Vimla, Delhi
240.Umesh Bai, Delhi
241.Resham Bai, Delhi
242.Rani Bala, Delhi
243.Bijli Banjara, Bihar
244.Resham Bai, Delhi
245.Ashma Begam, Kolkata
246.Mumtaz Begam, Kolkata
247.Anisha Bibi, Kolkata
248.Anjali Das, Kolkata
249.Archana Das, Kolkata
250.Lakhi Das, Kolkata
251.Parbati Das, Kolkata
252.Saptami Das, Kolkata
253.Shyamali Das, Kolkata
254.Arsha Kaur Deep, Delhi
255.Mem Deni, Delhi
256.Aarti Devi, Bihar
257.Aarti Devi, Bihar
258.Aasha Devi, Bihar

259. Bachhchhi Devi, Bihar
260. Badri Devi, Bihar
261. Bhagwanti Devi, Kolkata
262. Bhatuli Devi, Delhi
263. Chhoti Devi, Bihar
264. Chotki Devi, Bihar
265. Gulabi Devi, Bihar
266. Gunja Devi, Bihar
267. Kavita Devi, Bihar
268. Lachhi Devi, Bihar
269. Leela Devi, Bihar
270. Leela Devi, Bihar
271. Madina Devi, Bihar
272. Maitun Devi, Bihar
273. Manisha Devi, Bihar
274. Manju Devi, Bihar
275. Manju Devi, Bihar
276. Meena Devi, Kolkata
277. Punam Devi, Bihar
278. Rani Devi, Bihar
279. Rani Devi, Bihar
280. Rausan Devi, Bihar
281. Reeta Devi, Bihar
282. Rekha Devi, Bihar
283. Renu Devi, Bihar
284. Ritiya Devi, Bihar
285. Rukmani Devi, Kolkata
286. Sajriya Devi, Bihar
287. Salla Devi, Bihar
288. Sangita Devi, Bihar
289. Sarita Devi, Bihar
290. Satariya Devi, Bihar
291. Savitri Devi, Bihar
292. Seema Devi, Bihar
293. Shila Devi, Kolkata
294. Shobha Devi, Bihar
295. Shobha Devi, Bihar
296. Sita Devi, Kolkata
297. Siwani Devi, Bihar
298. Sona Devi, Kolkata
299. Sudama Devi, Bihar
300. Sunita Devi, Bihar
301. Tetri Devi, Bihar
302. Aras Deep Kaur, Delhi
303. Anita Khatun, Bihar
304. Anju Khatun, Bihar
305. Anwari Khatun, Bihar

306. Bano Khatun, Bihar
307. Chand Khatun, Bihar
308. Dukhni Khatun, Bihar
309. Fatima Khatun, Bihar
310. Gulshan Khatun, Bihar
311. Hajjo Khatun, Bihar
312. Lalita Khatun, Bihar
313. Manita Khatun, Bihar
314. Mehnaj Khatun, Bihar
315. Mehrun Khatun, Bihar
316. Munni Khatun, Bihar
317. Nagma Khatun, Bihar
318. Neha Khatun, Bihar
319. Nurejan Khatun, Bihar
320. Raushan Khatun, Bihar
321. Rushana Khatun, Kolkata
322. Sajjo Khatun, Bihar
323. Salma Khatun, Bihar
324. Sangita Khatun, Bihar
325. Shabanam Khatun, Bihar
326. Shabnam Khatun, Bihar
327. Shayama Khatun, Bihar
328. Pardeep Mala, Delhi
329. Deep Mala, Delhi

Survivors, Embrace Dignity, South Africa

330. Anonymous
331. Nequita
332. Portia
333. Veronica
334. Anthea Adams
335. Nomhle Bonzo
336. Natasha Dalains
337. Vuyiseka Dlaz
338. Monica Dyanti
339. Nadia Fester
340. Portia Gidani
341. Thembakazi Khwezi
342. Phindiswa Klaas
343. Joyce Kutyana
344. Wendy Lupuwana
345. Lindi Mafamba
346. Zingisa Magqaza
347. Pamela Mahobe
348. Anita Makeleni
349. Khalipha Mandindi
350. Pamela Maneli
351. Nomthandazo Manzini

- 352. Nandipha Maqabela
- 353. Nomakhosi Maqobola
- 354. Wendy Mbeka
- 355. Dakie Mdidimba
- 356. Mickey Meji
- 357. Listia Thandiswa Memani
- 358. Nolusindiso Mfuleni
- 359. Khuthazwa Mgwadleka
- 360. Thembeke Mhambi
- 361. Nopinki Mkiva
- 362. Luleka Mkosi
- 363. Mandy Mnyanda
- 364. Lungiswa Mohamed
- 365. Cynthia Morris
- 366. Sibongile Mthirara
- 367. Pumza Mtirara
- 368. Amanda Mtshakazana
- 369. Zandisa Mzamo
- 370. Nozuko Ndwanya
- 371. Thandile Ndzube
- 372. Monica Nongqongqo
- 373. Ntando Noyi
- 374. Thumeka Ntame
- 375. Nondumiso Ntsilite
- 376. Noluthando Nyama
- 377. Nosiphiwo Nyandeni
- 378. Natasha Petersen
- 379. Vredeline Ritz
- 380. Phalie Siswaba
- 381. Elzan Snell
- 382. Nokulunga Sotonoloshe
- 383. Nomathamsanqa Thema
- 384. Helen Van Wyk
- 385. Nomsindelo Vena
- 386. Nozuko Zamani
- 387. Lucy Vyver

- 388. Survivors, Talita, Sweden
- 389. Chris Stark, USA
- 390. Jessica Suarez, Colombia
- 391. Lisa-Marie Taylor, FiLia London, UK
- 392. Melanie Thompson, USA
- 393. Anna Travers, UK
- 394. Eunice Unoma, Nigeria
- 395. Claudia Urueña, Colombia
- 396. Sabrinna Valisce, New Zealand
- 397. Cheyenne de Vecchis, Italy

- 398. Denisse Velazquez, Mexico
- 399. Maricela Venegas, Colombia
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- 401. Jeanette Westbrook, SPACE (Survivors of Prostitution-Abuse Calling for Enlightenment) International, USA
- 402. Vosiney Wiley, USA
- 403. Rachel Wilson, UK
- 404. Blessing X, Nigeria
- 405. Serah Yeaboh, Maisha African Women in Germany, Ghana
- 406. Janna Zinaida, Russia