

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women: Submission to Women's Round Table

(on Friday 9 March 2001 a representative of CATWA, Jennifer Rice, made this submission on Women's Policy)

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Australia is part of the International Coalition Against trafficking in Women (CATW). CATW has category II consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations (UN). CATW Australia works nationally and internationally against the trafficking in women and children, and in support of Article 6 of the Convention for the Elimination Against Women (CEDAW), which calls for the prohibition of the exploitation in the prostitution of others.

Federal action on the traffic in women:

Federal legislation is needed to address the plight of women trafficked into prostitution in Australia. The current sex slavery legislation does not consider the needs of women who wish to escape from sex traffickers. Last year, 20 women from Thailand were discovered to have been held in debt bondage in Melbourne. They were repeatedly sold in two legal brothels owned by pimp and sex trafficker, Gary Glazner. All but one of the women were deported before they could testify against him. Judge White gave Glazner a suspended sentence and a fine, despite admitting that he had broken immigration laws and exploited the trafficked women. The judge also joked with Glazner, asking if he would give "freebies" to the male jurors at his brothels.

There are two main problems with the deportation of sex trafficked women. Firstly, the human rights abuses of sex trafficked women are not addressed. Secondly, the sex traffickers cannot be effectively prosecuted without the testimony of victims. We ask a new Labor government to sign the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime and implement the Protocol on the Trafficking of Persons into prostitution. This Protocol requires fair treatment of trafficked women and children.

Suggested guidelines for legislation regarding sex trafficking:

1. Trafficked women should be given residence because the human rights abuses against them have been committed on Australian soil. Residence visas are also crucial to the prosecution of traffickers.
2. Witnesses prepared to testify need protection from sex traffickers. The federal police would also need to work with Interpol to protect the families of trafficked women in their countries of origin.
3. Sex trafficked women are in particular need of shelter, trauma counselling, vocational training, language courses and financial support. It is important that the Australian government recognises the scale and seriousness of the human rights abuses involved in the trafficking of women and children, and the implications of the Australian government's inaction towards ending this cruel international trade.

Importance of taking a human rights approach to Australia's prostitution industry:

CATWA recognises that prostitution legislation is a state issue, but we encourage federal Labor parliamentarians to take the lead in promoting a human rights approach to prostitution. The demand of the local prostitution industry fuels the trafficking in women. Two very different approaches to prostitution dominate the international debate on the sex industry. One is the human rights approach and the other is harm minimisation.

Harm minimisation:

This assumes that it is inevitable that men will always need and have access to buy women in prostitution. This approach concentrates on public health: e.g. providing condoms, fresh syringes and putting women into brothels where they are supposedly at less risk for their lives. Whilst ostensibly in

the interests of women, this approach facilitates the long-term growth of prostitution by building the sex industry as a profitable economic sector and confirming that women should be sold to men.

Human rights approach:

This approach recognises the severe damage caused to the lives of prostituted women, and the social status of all women, by men's prostitution abuse. We consider that the model legislation in respect to prostitution is that which was implemented in Sweden in 1998. The Swedish legislation decriminalises the women used in prostitution and penalises the buying of sexual services. Therefore, it criminalises the pimps and users of prostituted women, rather than punishing the women used in prostitution. The Swedish legislation was part of a raft of measures concerned with ending violence against women, and clearly recognises prostitution as a form of violence against women. This genuinely progressive legislation was introduced by a Social Democratic Government. As the Minister for Gender Equality, Margarethe Winberg, was proud to state when opening a conference on prostitution on 2 February 2001: "Women are not for sale in Sweden."

The way forward:

We appeal to the courage of federal Labor parliamentarians to recognise that prostitution is a serious form of violence against women and children. According to the United Nations Population Fund Report 2000, 4 million girls and women are sold into the sex industry each and every year. In the light of the truly progressive laws and policies of your Social Democratic peers in Sweden and in the United Nations, we hope that the new Australian Labor government will implement policies to end this epidemic of violence against women and children.