

## **Paper for the lobby training workshop for women's NGO delegates attending the UN Commission on the Status of Women**

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CEDAW and trafficking. Article 6 requires that: 'States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women'. The most appropriate measure would be for the Australian government to sign on to the 1949 Convention Against the Traffic in Persons. Australia is in default of its international obligations in not signing. The Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Sub-Commission resolution 1999/17, for example, 'Urges Governments which have not yet done so, to ratify the Convention of 1949...'

The Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (21 mar 50) states in its preamble that 'prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons' are 'incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person'. The feminists who fought for this Convention through the League of Nations between the two world wars considered that the abolition of brothels and pimping was necessary for any effective challenge to trafficking in women and children for prostitution. Brothels provided entrepots, or storage depots for trafficked women, and were magnets for constantly renewed supplies of women from any source including trafficking. Thus the Convention commits contracting parties to punish any persons who entice another into prostitution, run brothels or profit from the prostitution of another, with or without the consent of that person.

Legalisation of prostitution in Australia has increased trafficking: In direct contrast with the spirit of this Convention several Australian states have now legalised, or are about to legalise, brothels, and therefore fuel the traffic in women. In Victoria brothels are legalised and regulated. In New South Wales brothels are deregulated and flourish with no control. In both states trafficking, particularly in Asian women, is a highly profitable industry and these women end up in both legal and illegal brothels.

100s of trafficked women are trapped in Australia as 'sex slaves' on bonded contracts that keep them working illegally in local brothels (The Age 21.8.99). The earnings from the up to 500 trafficked women in Australia at any one time are estimated at more than \$50 million a year. Brothel-keepers in Sydney report being approached weekly by people offering illegal workers. In Melbourne a court case has revealed Thai women kept in conditions of slavery, working in a legal brothel and being penetrated by 500 men before being paid any money(The Age, 1/12/99).

The Australian government showed its concern by bringing in new sexual slavery legislation in 1999, but this is ineffective because it relies on proof of conditions of servitude which is very hard to come by, police forces do not choose to monitor brothels once legalisation has taken place, and no resources have been allocated. Legislation to prevent the exploitation of prostitution is a vital foundation for the fight against trafficking and signing the 1949 Convention is a necessary beginning.