

**WRITTEN SUBMISSION to provide comment on
the ACTION PLAN CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK
for ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN**

Please complete your submission in a **Word.doc format** and email to the Office of Women's Policy (OWP):

submissions.owp@dhs.vic.gov.au

by **no later than Friday 23 March 2012.**

Should you have any questions relating to your submission, please contact the Office of Women's Policy - Selina Getley on 9918 7328 or Angela Bourke on 9918 7346.

Name of stakeholder/ organisation / individual making this submission:

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Australia (CATWA)

Name(s) and position(s) of the author(s) of this submission:

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The comments provided in this submission are from the perspective of (please bold or underline those that apply):

Academic/ research organisation

Advocacy/ representative organisation

Community/ sporting organisation

Indigenous organisation

Individual

Legal organisation

Local government

Non-government (not for profit)

Non-government (private, for profit)

Service provider/ support or resource centre

Statutory authority

Other (please specify).....

Submissions

The information provided in this submission will be used to inform a feedback report to the Minister for Women’s Affairs and other responsible ministers. The feedback report will consist of aggregated, de-identified information and will be used to inform the final Action Plan for addressing violence against women and their children. It is not intended that this report will be published.

Submissions will be treated in confidence and will not be published. Any request made under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* for access to a submission will be determined in accordance with that Act.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Please provide your feedback by responding to the consultation questions below.

1. Does the Consultation Framework provide balance in terms of addressing all forms of violence against women and their children?

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Australia (CATWA) would like to congratulate the government on forming a framework that takes the issue of violence against women to be both a serious and preventable crime. It is also commendable that sex trafficking is addressed here within the wider structure of violence against women, rather than being seen as a separate issue. Furthermore, it is a significant step forward that violence against women is understood in the Framework to stem from gender inequality. Finally, the whole of government approach to addressing violence against women, taken in the Consultation Framework, is also progressive.

CATWA, however, would like to raise the issue of violence against women in prostitution, which is largely unaddressed in this Framework. The industries of sex trafficking and prostitution are intimately connected and it is difficult to understand the violence against women perpetrated within systems of trafficking without understanding the way in which women experience violence in systems of (legal and illegal) prostitution.

Indeed, prostitution itself can be seen as a form of violence against women and is understood as such in a number of countries including Sweden, Iceland and Norway where the “Nordic model” of legislation regarding prostitution is in force. This model understands that the violence against women perpetrated through prostitution needs to be tackled by addressing the demand for prostitution or “sexual services”. In this model, there are public education campaigns about the harms (especially those to women and children in prostitution) of buying sexual services and, furthermore, the buying of sexual services is criminalised. This model is also currently under consideration in Ireland, France and Israel. The Nordic model understands that systems of prostitution prevent the possibility of true gender equality. That is, as long as it is considered socially acceptable for men to buy women and girls for sex, it is difficult for women to be recognised as fully equal citizens.

For further information see:

Waltman, M. (2011) Sweden’s Prohibition of Purchase of Sex: The law’s reasons, impact and potential. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, v34(5): 449-474.

2. Does the Consultation Framework provide the right balance between prevention, early intervention and response?

Yes. CATWA would like to commend the government for recognising the importance of prevention and the significance of cultural change, as well as the role that state agencies can play in creating cultural change.

3. Will the Action Areas improve primary prevention, early intervention and responsiveness?

CATWA believes that the Action Areas provide a useful framework for a more holistic approach to addressing violence against women. However, there is only very limited engagement with the issue of trafficking in the Action Areas. R23 is the only recommendation that relates specifically to trafficking.

It is particularly disappointing that sex trafficking and, by extension, prostitution are not more explicitly addressed in the areas of prevention and cultural / attitudinal change. Targeting the demand for prostitution would be a step forward in terms of reducing trafficking and promoting gender equality.

Primary prevention could be improved by addressing the demand for prostitution and trafficking through – at a minimum – public education campaigns about the harms of trafficking and prostitution. There have been several NGO campaigns, particularly focused on trafficking, launched around the world in an effort to dissuade men from buying women and children in prostitution. One of the most prominent has been the “Real men don’t buy girls” campaign in the United States (see: <http://demiandashton.org/realmen>). There have also been campaigns in Scandinavia where men have pledged not buy “sexual services” in a similar vein to the current White Ribbon campaigns in Australia where men swear not to commit, condone or excuse violence against women.

The “Nordic Model” should also be considered as a potential legislative approach in addressing the issue of sex trafficking.

4. Should particular Action Areas be prioritised?

The three initial action areas (Change attitudes and behaviours / Foster organisations, communities and cultures that are gender equitable and non-violent / promote respectful and gender equitable relationships between men and women, boys and girls) are critical and should be prioritised.

The remaining Action Areas will all be greatly improved if genuine change can be made in terms of underlying cultural attitudes about gender and violence.

5. Are there any gaps in the Consultation Framework that should be considered?

CATWA believes that violence against women in systems of prostitution needs to be directly addressed in the Framework, particularly with regard to sex trafficking.

Firstly, women in prostitution are especially vulnerable to violence and women who have been trafficked into prostitution are even more vulnerable. As such, prostituted women need access to specialist support services. This requires strategies of response and early intervention.

Secondly, CATWA understands prostitution itself to be a form of violence against women and that any framework for addressing violence against women cannot be complete without addressing the demand from men for the purchase of women's bodies in prostitution. This requires strategies of prevention.

One of the most important interventions for both of these issues is the establishment of fully-funded exit programs. CATWA notes that R23 in the Framework is the implementation of the government response to the *Inquiry into People Trafficking for Sex Work*. Recommendation 19 from that inquiry – which was supported in principle by the government – is that: “NGOs be encouraged and resourced to establish and further develop (in cases where already happening) exit strategies to support trafficked women wanting to leave the sex industry. Such a program would be aimed at providing such women with alternative skills and employment.” The government response specifically references the *Pathways to Exit* program run by RhED (Resourcing Health and Education in the Sex Industry) as a good model to build further programs.

RhED, however, operates mainly to support those in systems of prostitution not those who wish to exit. Indeed, *Pathways to Exit* is promoted on the RhED website as being aimed at those who “want to reduce the hours they work in the sex industry” rather than those wanting to leave it altogether and it makes no mention of supporting trafficked women in particular.

It is critical, therefore, that trafficked women, and women wanting to leave prostitution, be given independent and fully funded support to leave from mainstream health and social support services rather than on those which continue to support the sex industry.

The other significant gap, addressed in our comments to Consultation Question 1, is the importance of targeting social norms and attitudes regarding prostitution in order to change broader cultures which promote gender inequality and violence against women. There is an increasing awareness that sexism and discrimination are important underlying factors in creating a culture which allows and excuses violence against women. Allowing and condoning the buying of women in systems of prostitution, not only leaves a particular group of women especially vulnerable to violence, but it also significantly undermines attempts to promote gender equality.

At a minimum, public education campaigns about the harms of prostitution and sex trafficking are required. These should aim to reduce demand for prostitution. Such programs mirror the current public health approach to smoking. While smoking remains legal, governments aim to raise awareness of the harms of smoking, and therefore reduce demand for smoking, through public education campaigns.

6. **How can future governance arrangements most effectively engage partners across government and community?**

CATWA would like to thank the government for opening the Consultation Framework for public comment.

7. What are the potential barriers and risks to be managed and mitigated in delivery of the actions?

No further comment.

8. What other issues need to be considered?

If you would like to provide comment on any specific action areas as set out in the Consultation Framework, please specify the number of the action area(s) on which you are commenting. For example P1, E12 or R29.

No further comment.

Follow up

Do you give permission for the Office of Women's Policy OWP to obtain further information from you or your organisation? **If so, please ensure you have provided relevant contact details on page 1 of this submission.**

Yes

No

Written submissions are required **no later than Friday 23 March 2012.**

Please submit via email (in a Word.doc format) to submissions.owp@dhs.vic.gov.au.

The Minister for Women's Affairs **thanks you for taking the time to provide feedback** on the Action Plan Consultation Framework for addressing violence against women and their children.
