

## Over 400 women's groups & advocates sign letter protesting Amnesty International's position on prostitution

MEGHAN MURPHY / JULY 24, 2015

<http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/feminist-current/2015/07/over-400-womens-groups-advocates-sign-letter-protesting-amne>



The human rights organization, Amnesty International, has quietly been trying to pass a policy proposal calling for the decriminalization of the sex industry. It was only **this month** they announced their intentions but, while even the International Secretariat admitted the Amnesty International Council had made a mess of the consultation process, what really happened was that the organization ignored critical feedback and ensured many members were not even aware that **there was a draft policy in the works**.

When the draft was leaked early in 2014, there was **uproar** from **feminists** and **survivors across the globe**.

Members were consequently offered three weeks — **from April 2 – 21, 2014** — to provide feedback on **the document**, a small window made even smaller by the fact that most members did not even receive notification that this process was available to them. This was followed, a few months later, by an updated draft which doubled down on their rejection of the Nordic model and the criminalization of any aspects of the sex industry whatsoever. More generally, the document reeked of libertarian ideology, bravely supporting individuals' "right to seek, buy, sell or solicit paid sex... protected from state interference."

God forbid the state intervene in men's right to paid blow jobs.

On July 7th, 2015, an **updated draft was released to its members**, intended to "inform discussion and debate during the International Council Meeting 2015 of a potential policy on respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of sex workers." This sentence, in and of itself, conveys so much about the purpose of the document. No mention of the rights of women and girls not to have to provide sexual services to men. No mention of bodily

autonomy outside of women's role as sexualized bodies that men have the right to use and abuse at will. No mention of the myriad of factors that drive women and girls into the industry such as colonialism, poverty, sexual abuse, patriarchy, racism, imperialism and coercion. How can a policy on prostitution mention "gender equality" but fail to mention the entire foundation for a sex industry: *gender inequality*? Essentially, Amnesty International is advocating for our "equal rights," as women, to prostitute ourselves, pretending as though this is a progressive move.

I mean, who wrote this, **Dennis Hof**?

In response to this policy proposal — which, in reality, supports those who wish to open and profit from legal brothels and earn the right to buy women, free of shame and stigma, not women's rights (maybe Amnesty International should poll women and girls worldwide and find out how many of them think their liberation lies in their "right" to fuck strange men for money) — an **open letter** signed by **over 400 advocates and organizations** was published on Thursday, calling for "Amnesty to stand on the side of stand on the side of justice and equality for all."

Signatories include: Meryl Streep, Julie Bindel, Kate Winslet, Rachel Moran, Angela Bassett, Eve Ensler, Emily Blunt, Ruchira Gupta, Lena Dunham, Robin Morgan, Carey Mulligan, Lee Lakeman, Anne Hathaway, Janice Raymond, Sarah Jones, Kevin Kline, Lisa Kudrow, Kyra Sedgwick, Emma Thompson and many, many more.

The letter points out that legalization has only resulted in "the explosive growth of legal brothels" and did not succeed in making the industry "safer" for women but rather resulted in an increase of trafficking in order to fill the demand. In Amsterdam, for example, up to 90 per cent of women in brothels "are Eastern European, African and Asian women who are being patronized by predominantly Caucasian men." Germany has fared no better.

...The 2002 German deregulation law spawned countrywide brothel chains that offer "Friday night specials" for men who have license to purchase women for sexual acts that include acts of torture. This prompted mainstream news outlets to tag Germany the "Bordello of Europe." Last year leading trauma experts in Germany petitioned their government to repeal the 2002 law, underlining the extensive psychological harm that serial, unwanted sexual invasion and violence, which are among the hallmarks of prostitution, inflicts on women. Harm reduction is not enough, they explain; governments and civil society must invest in harm elimination.

Amnesty's proposed position is similar as that taken by the HIV/AIDS sector such as UNAIDS and, in Canada, the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and the Canadian AIDS society. This position is primarily rooted in blind support for simplistic harm reduction policies that allow governments to do as little as possible to help their citizens (i.e. provide free needles, but not housing, mental health services, detox beds and provide condoms but not viable employment,

affordable post-secondary education, universal daycare, or exiting services for women in prostitution).

The primary goals of UNAIDS and other agencies that support limited harm reduction policies in the sex industry seem far more concerned with the health of sex buyers than the lives of prostituted and sex trafficked women.

Further, the letter argues that Amnesty's support for the full decriminalization of the sex industry amounts to "gender apartheid," in which more privileged women are offered education and employment opportunities that other women are not, offering marginalized women up, instead, for "consumption by men" and for the profit of pimps, traffickers, and brothel owners.

International laws and covenants recognize the abuse of power over acutely vulnerable populations — the poor, the incested, the transgendered, the homeless — as a tool for the purpose of exploitation. Disenfranchised women of color, including Aboriginal, Native, First Nations, African American and "Scheduled Castes" women, are overwhelmingly represented among the prostituted and the sex trafficked. Every day, we combat male access to women's bodies through power and control, from female genital mutilation to forced marriage; from domestic violence to violation of reproductive rights. The exchange of money for such access does not eliminate the violence women face in the sex trade.

Amnesty International exists to uphold the human rights of everyone, globally. It is unconscionable that such an organization would offer anything less but opposition to the global objectification, abuse, rape, and enslavement of women and girls, worldwide.

*With contributions from Simone Watson, a prostitution survivor and director of **Nordic Model Australia Coalition (NorMAC)**.*

***You can sign the petition to ask Amnesty International not to adopt a policy that supports the full decriminalization of the sex industry at [Change.org](https://www.change.org).***