

“Shifting The Burden”

by Autumn Burris

July 13, 2016 Sex Trade Survivors Symposium, London, House of Commons, Survivors for Solutions, USA

As part of the international Abolitionist Movement, twelve exited Survivors of the Sex Trade from eight (8) countries contributed to six of the seven panels at the Sex Trade Survivors Symposium. Representatives from Ireland, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, England, France, the United States and Canada shared their expertise and lived experiences. The symposium was sponsored by Survivors of Prostitution-Abuse Calling for Enlightenment (S.P.A.C.E.) and women@thewell, its London-based partner.

The symposium was conducted in the United Kingdom to affirm the support of survivors of prostitution for the emerging recommendations from the recent Home Affairs Select Committee interim report, which recommends the decriminalization of prostituted persons.

There were no empty seats in the Jubilee Room in the House of Commons. One could feel the passion of the exited Survivors, allies and the audience. Together, the participants conducted a respectful and necessary dialogue regarding prostituted individuals, exit services, law enforcement solutions from Sweden, holding purchasers of sex accountable for their currency driving the sex trade and racism within the sex industry followed by engaging questions from the audience.

The panel, moderated by Julie Bindel, “Women’s Experiences of different Legislative Models” across four countries detailed the lived experiences and cultural implications of legislation. Survivors from Germany, Australia, England and the United States described not only their experiences as prostituted women but how laws on prostitution impact their lives. Autumn Burris, from Survivors for Solutions, briefed the audience on upholding the Palermo Protocol which is aimed at achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment. Sexual exploitation happens on a continuum of legal and illegal forms of the sex trade. Burris said, “There isn’t always a trafficker but there is always a sex buyer”. A survivor from Australia, said, “I have never worked any place where there is such overt discrimination towards women than in a brothel, where we are treated like second-class citizens by the owners; that will never change because if we were treated well then we would start to respect ourselves and that’s bad for business because prostitution is about men making money from the control and degradation of women.” The survivors on the panel advocated for exit services for exploited individuals, holding sex buyers accountable. They are also champions for gender equality for all women.

Taina Bien-Amie, Executive Director, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women moderated the panel, “Racial Marginalization as an entry point into the Sex Trade,” which featured three exited survivors. Vednita Carter, Founding Director/President of Breaking Free, Ne’cole Daniels, Founding Director, Survivors on the Move and Canada-based Bridget Perrier. The panel was a

powerful testimony on the connection between slavery and the current sex trade. “We discussed how Black and Indigenous women are paid different than Caucasian women in the sex trade and systematic racism that fuels the industry. The discussion included intergenerational trauma, poverty and social issues,” said Ne’cole Daniels “Slavery has not ended for African American women, it just has a new name "called prostitution." Dr. Vednita Carter.

Sabrina Valisce is an Australian citizen who moved to New Zealand at age 14 as a permanent resident. She describes herself as an Auskiwi. She is a survivor who was exploited prior to and during decriminalized prostitution and provided the keynote describing “The Impact of Decriminalized Pimping and Sex Buying in New Zealand.” She had championed decriminalization until she witnessed its carnage. "The pro-decriminalisation and pro-legalisation lobbies argue, 'Her body, her choice' but I argue choice ends with entering the industry. From that point on it is an endless string of demands punters place on women. They tell women what to do with their bodies, even how to dress.” The keynote was a conversation between Ms. Valisce, Rachel Moran and Julie Bindel.

“Targeting the Demand-The Social Justice Response” combined Swedish Police Officer Simon Haggstrom and cooperation with social workers, Agnete Strom, International Coordinator, The Women’s Front of Norway covered the situation in Norway and Jeanette Westbrook explained why this approach is necessary. Ms. Westbrook had this to say, "What we are talking about here is worldwide organized crime and terrorism fueled by the demand of buyers to exploit and torture women and children. We need law enforcement to step forward and enforce existing laws against prostitution and help change those laws that enable this carnage to exist." ~Jeanette Westbrook MSSW, CSW, Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Rachel Moran, Founder, SPACE International, Author of *Paid For, My Journey Through Prostitution* spoke in closing, Moran said, "On Wednesday 13th July 2016 an enormous impact was made right in the heart of the British Parliament by SPACE members and our international allies. Survivors, politicians and activists from across the western world gave evidence of the harms of prostitution and the measures necessary to combat it"