

# Survivors say the Nordic model is our only hope

*By Meghan Murphy, published March 15, 2016*

<http://www.feministcurrent.com/2016/03/15/survivors-say-the-nordic-model-is-our-only-hope/>

People were turned away from a packed, standing-room only panel, addressing the impacts of various prostitution legislation around the world, on Monday afternoon. Organized by [SPACE International](#), the [parallel event](#), which took place in New York City in connection with the [60th session](#) of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#), featured the voices of survivors-turned-front-line-workers from around the world — women we rarely hear from in the so-called “sex-work” debate, despite their expansive experience in various aspects of the sex trade. Moderated by Rachel Moran, co-founder of SPACE, Bridget Perrier, who is a survivor of child prostitution and human trafficking, spoke first, addressing the dire situation faced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada. An Ojibawa woman who lives in Ontario, Perrier was heavily involved in the passage of [Bill C-36](#), Canada’s new prostitution legislation, which criminalizes sex buyers as well as people who profit from the exploitation of women and girls, but decriminalizes prostituted women. Despite our new laws, she points out that there has been “non-action” from authorities and city officials in many provinces, including in B.C., where the police and [Mayor Gregor Robertson have essentially refused to enforce the new laws](#), allowing johns to operate with impunity.

Perrier called the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, where Indigenous women are far [overrepresented](#) in the sex trade and where many have gone [missing and been murdered](#), “a war zone,” saying the link between prostitution and the missing and murdered women is undeniable. Beyond holding men who buy sex accountable, Perrier put forth another demand to the Canadian government: “We are asking that when a man kills an Indigenous women, he be charged with a hate crime.”

Cherie Jiminez, from Boston, says that it’s still illegal to sell sex, but there are now higher penalties for pimps and traffickers in Massachusetts. The problem is that, in order to prosecute exploiters, “you need the cooperation of women... But without a way out, without access to safety and supports, this is not working.” She points out there were no provisions in Massachusetts’ legislation for funding, so these exiting services and supports simply aren’t there. As a result, Jiminez and some other survivors created their own program, with very limited funds, called the [EVA Center](#). “But we need exiting services everywhere, across the U.S.”

She says that trafficking legislation like that which exists in her state will never work if we don’t address prostitution, as a whole. “The sex trade plays out differently in different parts of the world,” Jiminez says. “It’s all about who’s vulnerable.” And in Boston, she says that 90 per cent of the women she’s met who

are in prostitution are local women. “We have a huge, domestic, violent, pimp-prostitution industry.” Fifty per cent, Jiminez adds, are women who aged out of the residential care system: “It’s our own failed policies creating the vulnerability.” Beyond that, 30 per cent of these women had children at a young age, which meant these kids went right back into the same systems their mothers came out of, creating an intergenerational problem.

That these women are caught up in the criminal justice system, due to prostitution charges as well as other related charges, makes it even more difficult to get out of the industry. “We know what happens to people in this country who have felony charges — you’re marginalized and almost excluded from participating in life.”

“The journey out is complicated,” Jiminez says, who spent 20 years in the sex trade herself. “It’s not a rescue thing.” This is to say, you can’t simply pluck women out of prostitution without also providing systems to support them once they are out, without providing them with a place to go, skills, and education. “We need the Nordic model — it’s the only successful model that works.”

Jeanette Westbrook, a survivor from Louisville, Kentucky, tells the audience that one of the biggest events, with the largest amount of trafficking in the United States, is the Kentucky Derby, which takes place in May. Women from across the state, country, and the world are brought in for the event, to service the elite.

Despite laws against prostitution, it happens right out in the open in Kentucky and johns are not arrested in the state.

She points out that, in the U.S., there are concerted efforts to separate prostitution and trafficking despite the fact that “it is one in the same.”

Westbrook says, “That continuum of violence began years ago in incest, child abuse, and poverty.” She says there are no services for prostituted women and the first safehouse, recently opened in Louisville, can only take 18 women at a time. “Human trafficking, since slavery, has never stopped in Kentucky,” Westbrook says.

Like the other women on the panel, Westbrook insists that the Nordic model is the only solution, specifying that this must be adopted federally, “not state-by-state.”

Ne’Cole Daniels, SPACE International’s newest member, has been “out of the life” for 15 years. She is from San Francisco and says that, like in other states, prostitution continues in California, despite the fact that it is illegal. In her experience delivering direct services to survivors of the sex trade for over a decade, she says “the common theme is reintegration — re-entering into society.” Of course, this is next to impossible so long as victims remain criminalized in the U.S.

Daniels points out that it’s not only prostitution that girls and women are charged with, but secondary crimes related to guns, drugs, and alcohol. “If you don’t make your quota,” Daniels says, “you’ve got to make the money somehow,” referring to the demands pimps make of the women and girls they prostitute.

She says that girls age out of social housing at 18, coincidentally the same age at which it suddenly becomes acceptable for women to be prostituted — the magical birthday when exploitation becomes “consensual.” Daniels says that most of the women and girls she sees in prostitution come from dysfunctional backgrounds

and/or are coming out of the foster care system, making them “moving targets.” Women’s only chance of leaving the industry lies in the Nordic model, she says. “We can’t regulate prostitution,” Daniels adds. “Legalization only leads to more victims than services.”

Fiona Broadfoot is a survivor of child exploitation from Yorkshire, a county in northern England. “I live with a criminal record as long as my arm,” she says. “And we’re still criminalizing children in one of the wealthiest countries in the world... for their own abuse.” Broadfoot says that, despite the law being the same across England, there is no consistency in its application. “Every local police authority makes their own decisions — some ignore [prostitution] completely, some criminalize the women and children. While occasionally a punter gets arrested, largely it’s the women who are criminalized.”

Leeds, Broadfoot reminds us, recently created a “safe zone” for prostitution, “where men can rape women, beat women, and even kill women.” She’s not exaggerating — in the pilot year, a [23-year-old Polish woman was beaten and murdered](#) by a john. Broadfoot adds that there were two reported rapes and one reported serious assault in that pilot year, yet, in January, she says, “we were told that it worked — they were going to go ahead with a legalized rape camp.”

Broadfoot was prostituted for 11 years and has worked as an activist and support worker for 20. She was involved with a pilot for a “john school” 15 years ago, which was said not to have worked, despite the 70 men who were put through the program, as supposed first-time offenders. Broadfoot, though, says, “I saw men in that room who bought me when I was 15-years-old.”

“Women and girls are beaten and raped daily, and men are not held accountable,” she said. “And until we adopt the Nordic model, we will be fighting to save their lives.”

Marie Merklinger lives in Germany, where prostitution has been legalized since 2002. The stories she tells about the country are almost unbelievable... But true. “It’s a completely unregulated situation,” she says. The only difference between legalized regimes and what is called “decriminalization” (which simply means all aspects of prostitution are fully decriminalized and unregulated) is that, under legalization, the women working in the many brothels have to pay taxes. The idea behind this was, supposedly, in order to enable prostituted women to access social supports like a pension and health care, but the reality is that almost none of the women working in the German sex trade have access to these systems. Many women who age out of prostitution simply live the rest of their lives in poverty, while others will work until they are 80, even 90 years old. “Men’s fantasies know no boundaries,” she says. “If there is access, someone will buy it.” Any and every woman can be fetishized and commodified. Even pregnant women are offered up for gangbangs in Germany, no condoms required.

Merklinger says there are about 400,000 prostituted women in Germany. The brothels, she says, are managed like hotels, so the women hand much of their earnings over to the owners, in rent — they live and work in these rooms. About 90 per cent of these women come from marginalized populations in Eastern Europe, like the Roma, and can’t report abuse to the police because they’ll then be homeless and out of work. In any case, the police can’t do much, because most of what happens in the brothels is legal, including the flatrate ones, wherein

women have to service up to 60 men a day, something that often sends women to the hospital, due to injuries sustained.

It's not only the prostituted women who are affected — men in Germany simply don't respect women: not their wives, not the women they pay for sex. "It's all about the sexuality and the demands of men." The only solution, she says, is the Nordic model. These women need real options. And women everywhere deserve to be respected, not treated like receptacles for male abuse.

The stories were diverse and spanned the globe, but in the end, had everything in common, and demand the same solution: Decriminalization and real options for women, accountability for men.

Tags: [Bridget Perrier](#), [CEDAW](#), [Cherie Jiminez](#), [Fiona Broadfoot](#), [Germany](#), [Legalization](#), [Marie Merklinger](#), [Ne'Cole Daniels](#), [prostitution](#), [prostitution legislation](#), [Rachel Moran](#), [SPACE International](#), [the Commission on the Status of Women](#), [the missing and murdered women](#), [UN](#)

### **Meghan Murphy**

Meghan Murphy, founder and editor of Feminist Current, is a freelance writer and journalist. She completed a Masters degree in the department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University in 2012 and lives in Vancouver, B.C. with her dog. Follow her @meghanemurphy