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Community-based organization in Ottawa: Ontario Court of Appeal Decision Disappointing

OTTAWA-The AIDS Committee of Ottawa welcomes the decision by the Ontario Court of Appeal to maintain parts of the 2010 ruling that had declared current prostitution laws as being unconstitutional as it is an important step towards sex workers being granted their rights and being able to work in safety and in dignity. That said, the Ontario Court of Appeal's majority decision to uphold the law prohibiting communication for the purpose of prostitution is a disappointing decision that will have negative impacts on the women and men who are involved in street-level prostitution in Ottawa.

Khaled Salam, acting executive director of The AIDS Committee of Ottawa (ACO) states: "We are disappointed with the decision that came down yesterday. By upholding the communication law, marginalized women and men in our community will be forced to continue working in isolated, unsafe environments as well as face police discrimination and harassment".

Heather Money, ACO's Women's Outreach Coordinator adds: "the current working environment in Ottawa, where the Ottawa Police have identified a 'pattern' of violence targeting street-level sex workers, provides a clear example of the unacceptable working conditions that are fostered by criminal laws targeting the most vulnerable workers in our communities. On a daily basis, sex workers are asked to choose between implementing safety measures and running the risk of getting arrested. The safety of women and men's lives working in the sex trade needs to be our first priority."

Along with the dissenting judges, ACO wishes to emphasize the vulnerability of street-level sex workers and the devastating impact of these provisions on their right to life and security of the person. In other words, this decision leaves the most marginalized individuals at the mercy of criminalization which furthers the risk of violence they face.

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