

PRESS RELEASE

The AIDS Committee of Ottawa is disheartened by the direction taken by the Government as they table their bill on prostitution and recriminalize sex work

June 5th 2014, Ottawa, ON—

In light of last December's unanimous Supreme Court ruling recognizing that the criminal laws that prohibit aspects of prostitution increase harm, of the decades of research and government reports supporting the Bedford decision and, more recently, of the publication of a new study in the prestigious British Medical Journal (BMJ) Open demonstrating the devastating impact the Swedish Model of asymmetrical criminalization has on sex workers, the AIDS Committee of Ottawa is disheartened by the new bill tabled by the Government yesterday.

Evidence unequivocally demonstrates that the criminalization of sex work, full or asymmetrical, and the accompanying lack of respect for sex workers' human rights forces sex workers to work in circumstances that diminish their control over their working conditions and leaves them without the protective benefit of labour and health standards. In contrast, the decriminalization of sex work, achieved in New Zealand in 2003, has been associated with better and improved health both on an individual and on a community level.

The Global Commission on HIV/AIDS and the Law points out that legal environments that deny human rights to security provide fertile ground for the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The draft legislation proposes a model that criminalizes the purchase of sexual services, the advertisement of sexual services, and communication in public for the purpose of prostitution by anyone, and it effectively prohibits indoor sex work. Far from protecting vulnerable individuals, this approach reproduces the harms of our former prostitution laws which were struck down for violating sex workers' constitutional right to security. Instead, recognizing the public health and safety benefits of decriminalizing both the selling and the purchase of sexual services, the World Health Organization and UNAIDS both recommend decriminalizing sex work.

We had high hopes that following the Bedford decision, our Government would ensure that new legislation for prostitution would be evidence based and prioritize the health and well-being of sex workers. The AIDS Committee is deeply disappointed that the new bill tabled yesterday falls short of that

A summary and the BMJ Open publication is available here: <http://www.gshi.cfenet.ubc.ca/crimclients>

☞A summary and the constitutional analysis of the research is available here:
http://www.pivotlegal.org/my_work

For more information or to book interviews:

Khaled Salam, Executive Director 613-238-5014 ext. 234 or ed@aco-cso.ca