



Sex Workers Outreach Project

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Media Advisory

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Sex Workers Urge Obama Administration to Help Stop Violence

Sex workers will submit a letter and demands to President-elect Obama and select cabinet-appointees Wednesday December 17, 2008 to mark the 6th Annual International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. This year mourners will gather in Franklin Square Park for a rally and march to the Department of Justice where a vigil will be held to honor sex workers who've been murdered or assaulted. Sex workers are demanding that this administration enact policy changes that would prevent violence and improve public health.

"Sex workers are the experts at identifying harm in the sex industry and developing solutions," said Tara Sawyer, Board Chair of the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP-USA), a national peer-led network of sex workers who initiated this day in 2003 when Gary Leon Ridgway aka the Green River Killer was convicted for murdering 48 prostitutes over a 21-year period near Seattle, WA. Sawyer went on to say, "For most sex workers, their criminal status keeps them from working in safer conditions and seeking out assistance from law enforcement if assaulted or robbed."

"Sex workers experience a disproportionate level of preventable violence in our country," said Kelli Dorsey, Director of Different Avenues, a DC -based organization co-sponsoring this event, "People of color and transgender people are overwhelmingly targeted. This discrimination is too often ignored by society."

Cyndee Clay of HIPS (Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive), also DC-based, said her organization is participating in this event "Not only to commemorate and honor those who have been victims of shame and stigma, but also to demand that the voices of those who experience violence within the sex industry are visible."

Interviews are available with sex workers attending the vigil in DC as well as nationwide by using the contact info above. Email to request media kit. See website for listing of vigils around the world. Media and the public are welcome at the DC rally and vigil:

December 17, 2008 12pm-3pm
Franklin Square (14 ST NW & Eye ST NW) near McPherson Square Station and procession to Department of Justice at 950 Pennsylvania Avenue

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Sex Workers Outreach Project

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Dear President-Elect Obama,

December 8th, 2008

We are a coalition of sex workers, friends and family members, and allies including community organizers, medical professionals, social service workers, academic researchers, and advocates. We are writing to congratulate you on your victory. For so many Americans, including sex workers, you represent the hope that we will see critical changes that will improve life for all.

We are concerned about conditions for some of the most marginalized members of our society: women, transgender people, and others who work in the sex industries. Many in our communities are greatly affected by poverty, prejudices, and incarceration. We are further disenfranchised through racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and economic oppression.

December 17th, 2008 is the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. This day was initiated by the Sex Workers Outreach Project- USA (SWOP). We have been joined by organizations around the world in our efforts to draw attention to violence against sex workers. We'd like to extend an invitation to you and the next First Lady, Michelle, to join in this world-wide call for equal rights and protection. Studies done by the University of California in San Francisco show that most sex workers are afraid to turn to police when they experience abuse. Furthermore, abuse against our communities is often committed by law enforcement. As a result, our communities suffer a disproportionate amount of preventable violence and deaths.

We know that only rights can stop these wrongs. We are confident that you will hold true to your campaign promise of bringing real change for the better to ordinary Americans. Sex workers, whether you see us or not, are everywhere. We are sons, daughters, siblings, cousins, spouses, and parents. We play an important role in our society and make valuable contributions to our communities and to our families. Our health and safety is a valuable asset to our country. It is in the best interest of all Americans that sex workers enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as other employees, contractors, and business people.

Attached you will find a call to action and an outline of the human, labor, and civil rights demands that we are working for. Thank you for taking these matters into consideration.

Sincerely,

Tara Sawyer
Board Chair
Sex Workers Outreach Project USA



Call To Action!

National March for Sex Workers Rights in
Washington, DC

December 17, 2008

6th Annual International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers
Join us as we march on Washington to demand Human Rights!

Who:

Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP-USA) and Allies

What:

Take a stand for justice, dignity, and safety for Sex Workers

When:

12pm-3pm

Where:

Franklin Square (14st NW & Eye ST NW) near McPherson Square Station

Why:

We are calling for an end to the unjust laws, policing, shaming and stigma that oppress our communities and make us targets for violence.

At this vibrant event, we will both honor the lives of sex workers whose lives have passed and celebrate our vital movement. SWOP-USA and its allies in harm reduction and social justice welcome your support!

See our list of demands on the next page!

This is a permitted event. For more information, or to endorse this event,

contact:

877-776-2004 x 3

dec17@swopusa.org

www.swopusa.org/dec17/

National March for Sex Workers' Rights 2008 Washington, DC

Our Demands:

Stop Shaming Us to Death

In the past two years we've seen two women commit suicide after high-profile sex scandals related to politicians. We are outraged that those who provide services, especially women, including transgender women carry the burden of sexual shame and punishment in our society while the very people who use our services are creating and enforcing legislation that violates our human rights. Furthermore, we are frustrated that the media emphasizes violence against female sex workers while ignoring the homophobia and transphobia that fuel violence against men and trans people in our community.

Violence Against Sex Workers Is Not Acceptable

Violence against us is not only tolerated, but even expected by society. Gary Leon Ridgway, the Green River Killer, murdered more than 60 women over a 21-year period with impunity. When he was finally apprehended he was quoted as saying: "I thought I could get away with killing hookers because nobody cares about them... I was doing the cops a favor by cleaning the trash up off the street." It is clear that labeling sex workers as criminals puts us at odds with law enforcement who should be protecting us and it sends a message to society that sex workers are expendable. Sex workers should not be criminals and violence against us should be classified as hate crime.

Listen to Sex Workers

Sex workers and their allies around the world have been in the forefront of the struggle against human trafficking, working together to address force, coercion and other abuses in the sex industry. Sex work done consensually by adults is distinctly different from human trafficking. The conflation of these concepts inhibits our role in contributing solutions to human trafficking and other abuses in our industry. There is a great deal of expertise from our communities defining safe work environments, identifying abusive situations and establishing a culturally appropriate community-based response to these problems.

Sex Workers Are Part of the Solution- Don't Silence Us!

The Report of the Commission on AIDS in Asia noted that sex workers are part of the solution to preventing the spread of HIV. This year, United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon called for an end to discrimination against sex workers noting that prevention is only available to sex workers in countries with laws that protect them. Harmful policies such as the Anti-Prostitution Pledge in PEPFAR gag sex workers and the agencies that serve us by forbidding funding to any organization that does not condemn the sex industry. There is much to be gained by repealing the Pledge and working with sex worker and public health organizations to define best practices.

Signatories

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A Project Of the AIDS Council of SA

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Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers
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International Committee on the
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Additional Resources:

Comprehensive listing of sex worker organizations:

http://www.desireealliance.org/resources/regional_organizations.htm

National March for Sex Workers Rights Resource Page:

http://www.swopusa.org/SW_NationalMarch08/

National and International Vigils December 17th, 2008

<http://www.swopusa.org/dec17/locations.htm>

Sex Work 101

<http://www.sexwork101.com/>

Bound Not Gagged– Sex Worker Political Blog

<http://www.BoundNotGagged.com>

SWEAT Study data prepared by Alix Lutnick and Deb Cohan

Can the Decriminalization of Sex Work Assist HIV Prevention?

http://stjamesinfirmarary.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/lutnick_sex-work-legal.pdf

Working Conditions, HIV, STIs and Hep. C Among Female Sex Workers in San Francisco

http://stjamesinfirmarary.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/lutnick_sex-work-culture.pdf