

## **The Warsaw Statement from Sex Worker Health and Rights Advocates**

Following is the joint statement Prepared for the 18<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Reduction of Drug Related Harm, held in Warsaw, Poland, in May 2007, by the sex workers rights activists. The statement was posted on the conference website and published in the final documents.

The statement is based on materials developed by Stella, a Canadian sex worker rights organization, for the 2006 International Conference on HIV/AIDS. A working group of sex workers and sex worker rights advocates committed to increasing the participation of sex workers and their organizations at the International Conference on Reduction of Drug Related Harm adapted Stella's statement in consultation with our communities and networks. We are pleased to present the following key messages about sex workers rights and harm reduction issues to delegates and participants in Warsaw:

- o **Human rights for sex workers:** Recognizing and ensuring the protection of sex workers' human rights is essential to promoting health and safety. By ensuring that sex workers have full enjoyment of their human rights, the discrimination and abuse that sex workers are often subject to can be reduced or eliminated and access to health and social services can be improved.
- o **Sex workers are part of the solution:** Sex worker leadership and empowerment are essential in fighting HIV and discrimination. Sex workers are their own best resource—they should be at the forefront of developing and implementing the programs and policies that impact their lives. It is only by empowering sex workers to speak for themselves and developing sex worker leadership that stigma and rights violations will be stopped.
- o **Sex work is work, not "harm":** Sex work (itself) is not inherently harmful. The reasons why people engage in sex work vary widely, as do the reasons why people chose a variety of other jobs. Many sex worker health and rights organizations incorporate a harm reduction framework when they address the needs of sex workers who use drugs. Other sex worker health and rights organizations have a less comfortable relationship with a harm reduction because "harm" is sometimes defined as sex work or sex workers (themselves). For sex worker rights advocates, the "harm" associated with sex work results from repressive environments in which sex work is not recognized as work and sex workers lack basic human rights and access to appropriate health services.
- o **Workers' rights for sex workers:** Sex work should be recognized as work in order to ensure safe and appropriate working conditions. The lack of workers' rights leaves sex workers vulnerable to abuse and poor working conditions.

In addition, following consultation during the 18th International Conference on the Reduction of Drug Related Harm, we would like to affirm that sex workers are key players in promoting human rights and harm reduction, and are pleased to do so in conjunction with allies who share our philosophies and commitment to justice.

**"Nothing about us, without us."**

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