

International Women's Strike, 8 March 2017

Declaration from the Global Sex Worker Movement

On March 8, in the spirit of solidarity as part of the International Women's Strike, sex workers will strike against poverty, criminalization and stigma, whether by refusing to go to work, charging double rates or by any other action possible.

We work selling sex in every country around the world. Our movement is inspired, fuelled and led by hundreds of thousands of sex workers. More than 87% of us are women, including transgender women; most of us are mothers. We take action to make the value of women's work, including sex work, more visible.

For decades sex workers have also been a driving force in the grassroots women's movement. We are the women who outlasted George W Bush and his long crusade against sex work, and we will survive Trump. We may not always have been heard, but women sex workers have never been silenced; our united voice calling for justice has only grown stronger.

Women sex workers have been part of the "feminism of the 99%" since the very beginning of time.

Our stories are the stories of all women in the 99%. We are mothers working to feed our children; we are migrant workers who support families back home; we are refugee women fleeing war and environmental devastation. We too have worked in the "hell factories" and on the land. We too have been forced into debt by rising prices and exploited in all types of waged work and in the unwaged work in our homes. Many of us also share the familiar dread of another day at work. We are from every country, race, religion and class.

Women hold absolute autonomy over our own bodies

Women must hold absolute autonomy over our own bodies irrespective of occupation, income, race, physicality, biology, relationship, sexuality, religion, pregnancy, immigration status, incarceration or any other variant. Millions of women especially those of us who are sex workers, poor, women of colour, lesbian, transgender, disabled or working class women, live under the constant threat of individual and institutional assaults on our autonomy. Those in power seek to control whether we can have children or not, what we can wear, where we must go or must never go, who we can marry or not. Any of us women who defy such control over our bodies, know far too well how harsh the punishment can be.

We defend ourselves daily from interference in our autonomy from state and non-state actors who use an arsenal of propaganda, shaming, stigma, negation, criminal persecution and prosecution. We refuse this interference whether it is done on the pretexts of morality, law enforcement, gender profiling, shame, abolitionist ideology, anti-trafficking, protection, national security, national image, social order, culture or religion.

As punishment for stepping out of line, we are lied about, spied on, arrested, forced to undergo medical procedures, shamed in the media, imprisoned, deported, or forcibly separated from our children.

Criminalisation

The draconian prostitution laws and their enforcement, often carried out by armed men, criminalize our work and seek to control our economic and sexual decisions. The law is institutional violence in and of itself. It also encourages and perpetuates individual acts of violence against us. Criminalization fuels stigma against us and for those of us who are women of colour, migrant and transgender women, this is compounded by racism. We face extortion (of money and sex) by corrupt police around the world and see our money taken from us in fines or stolen by the courts as proceeds of the crime.

Hundreds of sex workers around the globe, particularly migrant & transgender women and women of colour, are murdered each year with little or no investigation by the police and with no-one held to account. The prostitution laws send a signal to violent men that our lives don't count.

For migrant sex workers, whether we are labelled trafficking victims or criminals we will be caged and deported.

The prostitution laws are the main obstacle for us being able to access justice and reform the conditions we work in, including in countries where unionizing could lead us to winning labour benefits and protections. A criminal record severely limits our chances of getting other work when we want to.

Poverty and Work

Women's unwaged caring work on the land and in the home is the basis for the world's wealth yet most of the people forced to live in poverty are women. We reproduce all of the world's people and grow most of the world's food yet we are expected to go hungry. Life cannot be grown by hand anymore so a second waged job must be found. Transgender women, aged women, disabled women, women of colour, indigenous women, women with HIV, women who have been in prison and pregnant women are often refused work and are humiliated or turned down when seeking assistance from the State. Most of us women have no qualifications, no capital and few choices. Everyone is working too hard and being paid far too little and women are routinely paid less than what men earn for doing the same job.

One-seventh of the world's population of women works in the garment industry including in slave like conditions in 'hell factories'. We find work in other people's houses, on commercial farms, in shops, hair salons, hotels, and for those few of us who can, in other caring work such as teaching, nursing and social work. Many more of us sweep streets, work in construction, cook, beg, wash clothes, go garbage picking or babysitting.

No woman, man or child should be made ashamed of any work we have had to do to resist poverty and survive, and we sex workers are not ashamed. We share the

outrage of other women whose work is undervalued and unrecognized. In particular we are incensed that while so many millions of people rely on us for their very survival, as migrant women, begging women or sex workers, we are then criminalized and persecuted.

It is perfectly legal in all countries of the world to refuse food, water, medicine and shelter to another human being if they have no money to give in exchange. The people who sell food, water, medicine and shelter are respected business people, especially the owners of big companies like McDonalds, Nestle, Wellcome, Glaxco and Trump Company. It is moral, admirable, and legal to charge for the basic needs for survival but it's against the law for a woman to cross a border to survive, beg for change or charge for her own sexual labour? Wealthy corporations, economic systems and the poverty they create are all well protected by the law while women who resist the places of poverty assigned to us are criminals. We want the freedom to do sex work and freedom from having to do sex work.

Resisting land-grabs

In every capital city of the world, working class houses, brothels and slum communities, were originally built on the unfashionable fringes of the city. Time has passed and now the fringes are prime real estate. Slum dwellers, working class families and sex workers around the world are under threat of land grabbing, forced relocation and gentrification. In the famous areas such as Amsterdam, Soho, Dolly, Kings Cross, Taipei, sex workers have been harassed intimidated and in some cities violently evicted on the flimsy pretext of prostitution laws, anti-trafficking, moral or religious clean ups. Women are pushed further away from the safety of the community and made to work in dangerous areas such as industrial zones.

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Given the difficulties we women face in doing sex work, the fact that we still do is not just an indication of our strength and resilience, but also verifies both the levels of exploitation that exists in all waged work and the complete failure of economic systems to address poverty.

Sex workers will strike against interference in our bodily autonomy in mutual solidarity with all other women; disabled, transgender, lesbian, mothers (including single mothers), queer, women of colour, women incarcerated, pregnant women, young and old .. who fight similar battles as we do in order to claim their own bodily autonomy.

We strike in solidarity with women of colour, women incarcerated, migrant women, begging women, women who use drugs, transgender women, asylum seekers, Muslim women, and all women who like sex workers are stigmatised, discriminated against and persecuted by the law and law enforcement.

We strike in solidarity with all women against poverty, inequality and austerity and in solidarity with all mothers against the devaluing and exploitation of women's caring work, waged and unwaged, including our work, sex work.

We strike in solidarity with all indigenous women, farming women, slum dwellers, women who live in public places, and all working class and poor women who are also threatened by land grabbing and gentrification as we are.

We strike for decriminalization of sex work, to end criminal persecution and exploitation by corrupt authorities.

We strike for a living wage for mothers and carers paid in cash or land.

We strike for an end to stigma and the violence it fuels against sex workers.

We strike for equal protection and access to justice as is our inherent right.

We strike for respect for our human dignity under the law and in society.

We strike to end assaults on our bodily autonomy by those promoting hatred and prohibitionist ideologies which serve to divide women from each other.

We the sex workers of "feminism for the 99%" refuse to be divided from our sisters any longer.

Our strength is your strength.

Conceived by Empower Foundation, Thailand and English Collective of Prostitutes, UK; endorsed by the Global Network of Sex Work Projects which includes sex worker-led organisations in 77 countries spread across all the regions of the world.

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