



English Collective of Prostitutes

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Kenneth Baker MP
Home Secretary
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

28 November 1991

Dear Home Secretary,

re: Prostitute women and condoms

We are writing to ask for an end to the use of possession of condoms as evidence to arrest and convict prostitute women on charges of loitering and soliciting.

As you know, government policy on HIV and AIDS encourages "safer sex", particularly condom use, yet prostitute women are criminalised for practising what the government preaches to us.

Throughout the UK the police search women they presume to be prostitutes for condoms. The presence and number of condoms at the time of arrest is recorded on the custody sheet which is later read in court. It can determine whether a woman is arrested, charged and/or found guilty. We enclose a letter from a solicitor in Sheffield about this. In addition, the police use possession of condoms as a way to obtain convictions without having to gather any evidence that the women were loitering or soliciting. This leads to women being arrested while not working because they have condoms on them, and to corrupt police officers planting condoms on women whom they wish, for a variety of reasons, to take into custody.

More and more women are forced on the game by increasing cuts in benefits, homelessness and unemployment. Criminalised by the law for trying to make a living, prostitute women are then also accused of "spreading AIDS" by police, media and politicians. Research has confirmed our experience that these claims are unfounded. Those who make them are more concerned with witch-hunting women than with meeting the health needs of prostitute women, clients and the community at large.

The use of possession of condoms to prosecute prostitute women undermines women's efforts to protect their health and the health of others, as well as the efforts of health authorities and AIDS organisations working to stop the spread of HIV. Prostitute women already face clients' widespread reluctance to use condoms - it is common for clients to offer more money in order to have sex without protection. Some health authorities have attempted to help women refuse such offers by distributing free condoms in red-light areas. Yet in

spite of the additional risk of prosecution, most prostitute women do carry condoms, preferring to brave arrest rather than illness. But this police and court practice deters some by adding a further obstacle to "safer sex".

It has been widely reported that most women, particularly young women, have difficulty insisting on boyfriends or casual partners wearing condoms. Women's less powerful economic and social standing puts them at a disadvantage when deciding on sexual practices. Many women are reluctant to raise the issue of "safer sex" for fear of being considered "loose" or accused of being on the game. The fact that carrying condoms is used as evidence of prostitution reinforces such fears. This concern is not unreasonable: a woman solicitor arrested on her way back from holidays for carrying condoms in her bag was told that "possession of Durex is reasonable grounds [for arrest]". (*Daily Telegraph* 22 March 1987).

The English Collective of Prostitutes has been raising this double standard in government policy and its serious implications for everyone since December 1986, when we were consulted by Dr Thin, Consultant Adviser to the then DHSS in Genito-urinary Medicine and member of the DHSS Expert Advisory Group on AIDS. We raised it at the Global Impact of AIDS conference organised by WHO and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in March 1988; with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on AIDS on 5 December 1989; and in our pamphlet *Prostitute Women and AIDS: Resisting the Virus of Repression* which has been circulated widely.

If the government is at all serious about "safer sex", it must ensure that the Attorney General and the Crown Prosecution Service instruct police and magistrates all over the country that possession of condoms should no longer be used as evidence to arrest and convict prostitute women.

Yours sincerely,

Niki Adams

Nina Lopez-Jones

THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS AND PROMINENT INDIVIDUALS
HAVE ENDORSED THIS LETTER OR IN SOME INSTANCES HAVE
WRITTEN THEIR OWN ALONG THE SAME LINES.

The following organisations and distinguished individuals endorsed this letter or wrote their own along the same lines:

AIDS Organisations

ACT-UP Leeds
 ACT-UP Manchester
 ACT-UP 2 Direct
 AIDS Action North Humberside
 Aquarius (HIV/Alcohol Problems)
 Barnet Health Authority AIDS Education Unit
 Belfast AIDS Helpline
 Body Positive (London)
 Body Positive (Birmingham)
 Bradford Council HIV Unit
 Cambridge AIDS Helpline
 Camden HIV Workers
 Crescent
 DACAS (Drugs & AIDS Counselling & Advice Service)
 Devon AIDS Line
 East London HIV/AIDS Workers
 High Wycombe HIV Prevention Team
 HIV & AIDS Nursing Group
 Immunity Legal Centre
 Landmark
 Leicestershire AIDS Support Services
 The London Connection Detached Workers
 London East AIDS Network
 London Outreach Workers Forum
 Mainliners
 Manchester AIDS Line
 Manchester Action on Street Health
 Manchester HIV/AIDS Consortium
 Maryland Centre (Liverpool)
 National AIDS Counselling Training Unit
 National AIDS Manual
 National AIDS Trust
 NAHAW (Network Association of HIV & AIDS Workers)
 Names Project
 North West Herts HIV Training Group
 OXAIDS
 Phoenix (Barnet)
 Positively Individual
 Positively Healthy
 Positively Women
 Powys AIDS Line Services
 Preston Health Education AIDS Liaison
 Rochdale Health Authority AIDS Unit
 Sheffield AIDS Education Project
 South Bedfordshire Health Authority
 South Derbyshire Health Authority AIDS Liaison Unit
 South West Hertfordshire AIDS Forum
 Sussex AIDS Centre
 Terrence Higgins Trust
 World War III (Stop the War Against People with AIDS)

Disability & Health

Aberdeen Drugs Action
 Alcohol & Other Drug Team
 Association of Community Health Councils
 Barnet Drug and Alcohol Service
 Basement Project
 Blackburn Health Promotion Unit
 Bradford Working Women's Project
 Bridge Project (Drug Advice Line)
 Brighton Health Promotion Service
 Cableline
 Calderdale Well Woman Centre
 Caravan Needle Exchange
 Centenary Project (Edinburgh)
 CLASH (Central London Action on Street Health)
 Exeter Health Promotion Dept.
 GEMMA
 Hampstead Community Health Council
 Women's Health Group

Harm Minimisation Services, Bloomsbury & Islington Health Authority
 Herbert-Hone Clinic, Brighton Drug Dependency Unit
 Drug Dependents Anonymous
 Health Shop
 Healthwise
 Hungerford Drug Project
 Inside Out
 Leicester City Council Health Promotion Unit
 Mid Glamorgan Needle Exchange
 Northampton Centre for Health Promotion
 Northampton District Drugs Team
 North Ormesby Drug Advice & Counselling Service
 Pelvic Inflammatory Disorder Group
 Preston Women's Health Forum
 Preston Well Women Centre
 Rochdale Health For All Support Unit
 Rochdale Health Promotion Unit
 SAUCE (Street Aid, Useful Contact & Exchange)
 St Mary's Centre (Manchester)
 Scunthorpe Health Authority
 Shropshire Alcohol Counselling Service
 South Bedfordshire Health Authority
 South East Kent Health Authority
 Southampton Genito-urinary Medical Dept.
 Tameside and Glossop Community Health Council
 Tameside and Glossop Health Authority
 Turning Point
 Tyneside Women's Health Project
 Venkatesa Yoga & Healing Centre
 Westminster Drug Project
 West Norfolk & Wisbech Health Promotion Service
 WinVisible: Women with Visible and Invisible Disabilities
 Wirral Addicts Support Programme

Black Organisations

Asian Women's Support Group (Hackney)
 Ashiana Project
 Black Women for Wages for Housework
 Federation of Black Housing Organisations
 Jubo Shongho (Tameside)
 Manchester Black Resource Centre
 Newham Asian Women's Project
 Shakti Women's Aid (Edinburgh)
 Shapla Project

Women's Organisations

Aberdeen Women's Centre
 Ashton under Lyne Council Women's Advisory Group
 Belfast Women's News
 Durham County Women's Centre Campaign
 Feminists Against Censorship
 Hull Women's Centre
 No.20 Women and Children's Centre
 North West England Wages for Housework Campaign
 Pankhurst Centre
 Peterborough Women's Centre Collective
 Rotherhithe & Bermondsey Women's Group
 South London Women's Centre
 TIME OFF FOR WOMEN
 TIME OFF FOR WOMEN (North West England)
 Wages for Housework Campaign
 Warrington Labour Women in Media & Entertainment
 Women's Council

Women and Medical Practice
 Women's Prisoners Resource Centre
 Women's Therapy Centre
 Wimbledon Women's Group

Anti-Rape Organisations & Women's Aids

Avon Sexual Abuse Centre
 Aberswyth Women's Aid
 Belfast Rape Crisis
 Bexley Women's Aid
 Bradford Rape Crisis
 Brentford Against Sexual Abuse of Children
 Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre
 Canterbury Rape Line
 Crawford Rape Crisis and Support Group
 Cynon Valley Women's Aid
 Dundee Women's Aid
 Edinburgh & Lothian Women's Aid
 Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre
 Enfield Women's Aid
 Glossop Women's Aid
 Hackney Women's Aid
 Huddersfield Women's Aid
 Hull Rape Crisis
 In Support of Sexually Abused Children
 Liverpool Rape Crisis Counselling Service
 Liw Valley Women's Aid
 Montgomeryshire Women's Aid
 People Against Rape in Marriage
 Portsmouth Rape Crisis Centre
 Shepherd's Bush Women's Aid
 Shropshire Rape Crisis Centre
 South Essex Rape & Incest Crisis Centre
 Strathclyde Rape Crisis
 Wirral Rape Crisis Counselling Service
 Women Against Rape (Britain)

Lesbian and Gay Organisations

Campaign for Homosexual Equality
 Gay Rebirthing Group
 Lesbian Link (Manchester)
 Manchester Gay Centre
 North West England Wages Due Lesbians
 OutRage!
 Solent Gay Switchboard
 Wages Due Lesbians

Student Groups

Balliol Women's Group (Oxford)
 Bradford & Ilkley Community College
 Brunel University Students Union
 City of London Polytechnic Women's Group
 Durham University 1st yr Students
 Manchester University Students Union
 Women's Collective
 Polytechnic of Central London Students Union
 Project 2000 Students
 Roehampton Institute College Women's Group
 Rutherford College, Kent University
 Salford University Women's Group

Claimants Organisations

Haringey Unwaged Centre
 Haringey Unwaged Women
 Plymouth Claimants Union
 Tameside Welfare Rights Unit
 Tottenham Claimants Union

Religious Organisations

Caldmore Christian Action Group Project for Prostitutes
 Graigian Society
 Religious Society of Friends

Youth, Mixed and Men's Organisations

Anthea Trust
Barley Mow Village Hall
Cambridge Social Services
Cutting Edge
Easton Under 5s
Family Service Unit (Thurrock)
Frontline Books
Hattersley Court Residents Association
Leaving Home Project
Lifeshare
London Greenpeace
National Youth Bureau
Payday men's network
Swiss Cottage Community Centre
Streetwise Youth
Wilkes Street Residents

Legal/Probation/Civil Rights

Association for Juvenile Justice
Central London Community Law Centre
Haldane Society Women's Committee
Holborn Citizens Advice Bureau
Legal Action for Women (LAW)
Liberty (National Council for Civil Liberties)
North Camden Citizens Advice Bureau &
HIV/AIDS Project
North Kensington Law Centre
North Manchester Law Centre
Partners of Prisoners and Families
Support Group
Plumstead Community Law Centre
Release (National Legal & Drugs
Services)
Salford Law Centre
South Manchester Law Centre

Trade Unions/Labour Party

Brent East Labour Party Women's Section
Camden NALGO Women's Group
Elton Labour Party
Enfield Labour Party Women's Section
Southwark Trades Council Women's
Committee

Distinguished Individuals

John Arden
Ambika Bharati M.C.S.Ac.S.
Wilmette Brown
Michael Cashman
Harry Cohen MP
Steve Cohen
Jo Cooper
Margaretta D'Arcy
Ethel De Keyser
Glenda Jackson
Selma James
George Melly
Anne Neale
Andrew Puddephatt
Claire Rayner
Janet Suzman
Tony Whitehead
Benjamin Zephaniah
& over 100 other individuals including
prostitute women, HIV+ people, nurses,
health workers and probation officers