

Submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights
National Consultation on Human Trafficking in Canada

28 February 2018

Resist Exploitation, Embrace Dignity (REED) is a non-profit Vancouver organization. We stand with and for sexually exploited women and challenge the demand for paid access to their bodies. Since 2005 REED has engaged in friendships with women in the sex industry and provided crisis intervention, practical assistance, and connections to resources and supports.

After 13 years of relationship building, listening and learning, we know that:

- Prostitution is inherently violent.
- Prostitution is an abuse of power that perpetuates inequality. The buyer has the money, the privilege and the power. The women being purchased are disproportionately racialized, poor, marginalized and Indigenous.
- Most of the women in prostitution were recruited when they were children, often from foster care or unstable, abusive home environments, by boyfriends.
- Prostitution arises in an environment of sexual inequality, in which women's bodies are objectified through porn, advertising, and a culture that glamorizes and normalizes women's value as bodies used for men's sexual gratification.

As the Committee studies human trafficking in Canada, please consider:

1) Addressing the demand for paid sex is essential in order to eradicate the market for trafficking. The increasing male demand for paid sexual access to women's bodies drives the rapidly-growing sex industry. If we address demand, we eliminate the need for traffickers to supply poor and marginalized women and girls to meet that demand.

2) Prostitution cannot be separated from human trafficking. Trafficking has increased exponentially in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands where prostitution was legalized. Conversely, countries such as Sweden that hold purchasers accountable have seen a dramatic reduction in trafficking.

Human trafficking feeds a demand created by a flourishing sex industry. As more men seek to purchase sex, more women will be trafficked to meet that need. Human trafficking cannot be combated without also combating prostitution.

3) To be a truly feminist country, Canada should learn from the progressive feminist stance of Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Ireland, North Ireland, France and the European Parliament, who recognize the need to criminalize sex buyers. Instead of seeking only to reduce the male violence enacted against women in prostitution, the time has come for us to eliminate the market for it by stopping men from buying sex. Canada must recognize that women's human rights to equality and security of the person are incompatible with prostitution.

Our recommendations:

1. Bolster the efforts of those who are enforcing the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* to arrest the men who buy sex, as well as those who profit from the prostitution of others; compel all law enforcement agencies to enforce the *Act*; and defend the *Act* against constitutional challenge.
2. Ensure that Canada's human trafficking laws comply with the United Nations *2000 Human Trafficking Protocols*. Specifically, the definition of human trafficking should include reference to "the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability." The law should recognize the intersecting realities of sexism, poverty, colonialism's legacy, and other forms of social power.
3. Educate the public about sexual exploitation.
4. Fund a comprehensive network of social supports for trafficking and prostitution survivors, such as safe housing, addictions treatment, childcare, employment training, and trauma counseling.

Thank you for your consideration,
Mary-Lee Bouma
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