

**NEITHER SEX, NOR WORK:**

**ABOLISHING PROSTITUTION**

**TO PROMOTE DECENT WORK**



## ENGLISH TRANSCRIPT

PARALLEL EVENT TO THE 66TH  
SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON  
THE STATUS OF WOMEN  
ORGANISED ON MARCH 18, 2022

Organised by  
CAP International  
Co-sponsored by  
France, Sweden & OSCE/ODIHR  
With the support of  
Rescue Freedom



## **EVENT PROGRAM**

### **OPENING REMARKS**

Ms Anna EKSTEDT, Ambassador-at-Large for Combating Trafficking in Persons of Sweden

Mr Jean-Claude BRUNET, French Ambassador-at-Large against Transnational Criminal Threats

### **PANEL: REALITY & CONSEQUENCES OF PROSTITUTION, AN ANTITHESIS OF "DECENT WORK"**

Ms Diane MARTIN, Survivor (Scotland), Member of OSCE/ODIHR International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC)

Ms Esohe AGHATISE, Founder and Executive Director of Iroko Onlus (Italy, Nigeria)

Ms Flora WHITFIELD, Survivor, Communications and Program Manager for Breaking Free (USA)

### **PANEL: THE CONCEPT OF "SEX WORK", A VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF ALL WOMEN WORKERS**

Ms Sabine REYNOSA, Member of the Collective « Femmes-Mixité » of Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), France

Dr Muhammad Hidayat GREENFIELD, Regional Secretary of International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tourism, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) Asia Pacific

Mr Josua MATA, General-Secretary of Sentro Union, Philippines

### **Q&A WITH PARTICIPANTS**

*Moderated by Ms Claire GUIRAUD, Representative, Permanent Representation of CAP International to the UN in Geneva*

Speeches were given in English and French.

**Launching by moderator Ms. Claire GUIRAUD, Representative, Permanent Representation of CAP International to the UN in Geneva**

Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, everyone, and welcome to this parallel event entitled “Neither Sex, nor Work: abolishing prostitution to promote decent work”.

My name is Claire Guiraud, I will be the moderator of this event today. And as you can see, I'm working as the representative at the permanent representation of CAP International to the UN in Geneva.

Just some practical information to start. As you can maybe see, the event is available in three languages: English, Spanish, and French. So, if you want to select your language, you just have to click on the interpretation icon, which is the small globe at the bottom of your screen. And then you'll be able to hear your language. Thank you very much to the interpreters for the amazing work they are going to do for us today. Also, know that the event is recorded, and the replay will be disseminated afterward. If time permits, we would like to have a question-and-answer session. So please share your questions in the Q&R and I will reflect the questions to the panelists later.

So before leaving the floor to our distinguished panelists, I would like to say a few words about CAP International. CAP is the coalition for the abolition of prostitution. A coalition that is gathering 35 organisations, in 27 countries, that are

providing direct support services to the persons in prostitution. Those organisations are gathered with a common objective: the abolition of the system of prostitution, with a strong conviction that this is key to achieving gender equality for every woman and girl.

We are very happy to have this event today in the scope of the UN CSW, an event that is co-sponsored by France, Sweden, and the OSCE/ODIHR. We can just imagine being in New York overlooking the Hudson River and making abolitionism resonate in this key place for the negotiation of standards among the Member States.

So why have we chosen to discuss prostitution and decent work today?

First, because the review theme of the CSW this year is “women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work”. But also because this is a key issue in the debate about the best ways to eliminate sexual exploitation that traps every year 20 million persons in the world. 98% of them are women and girls, and most of them come from the most discriminated communities.

And despite the fact that we have very strong testimonies of survivors and very fact-based researches that teach us how harmful prostitution is,

And despite the fact that international standards are very clear on the incompatibility between prostitution and human dignity and decent work: we have the 1949 Convention, the CEDAW

Convention, the Palermo Protocol, and also extensive international standards of labour law to promote decent work that forbids sexual harassment in the workplace...

But yet some people, some organisations, and even some States believe that legalising or decriminalising prostitution, I mean fully decriminalising prostitution, could be a way to eliminate it, considering that prostitution could be a choice and even work. That is why they called prostitution “sex work”, which is a terminology that we, at CAP, don't agree with.

This is why we have developed also a specific campaign mobilising trade unions to promote decent work and not sex work. We have already gathered dozens of trade unions representing more than 10 million workers. We have three representatives of this campaign with us today and we will also be publishing videos statement from five others just right after this event from representatives of unions in India, Canada, Ireland, Norway, and Lebanon. If there are unions in the audience, or if you know unions that could be interesting, please reach out to us so that we can discuss this further.

To elaborate on this topic, we have gathered today experts, representatives of frontline organisations and survivors, representatives of trade unions, and Member States to bring their perspectives on the best practices to eliminate sexual exploitation and promote decent work.

On behalf of CAP, I would like to thank each of you distinguished panelists for your support, your availability, and your willingness to participate in this effort. I will introduce the speakers in the order they will speak.

I will now leave the floor to our two ambassadors representing Sweden and France. Thanks again for sponsoring this event. We are very grateful to be able to count on you again, three years after France and Sweden have developed a common strategy for combating human trafficking. We start right now with ambassador Anna Ekstedt, ambassador-at-large for Combating trafficking in Persons of Sweden. Thanks again very much and the floor is yours.

## **OPENING REMARKS**

**Ms. Anna EKSTEDT**, Ambassador-at-Large for Combating Trafficking in Persons of Sweden

Thank you very much, Claire. Dear fellow panelists and distinguished participants to this event. I am happy to be here, and I will share some of the Swedish experiences in addressing exploitation, prostitution, and trafficking for sexual exploitation. I also want to thank CAP especially for the invitation and for France and the OSCE/ODIHR to co-organise this event together with us.

As you are aware, the work against prostitution with a focus on targeting the demand and trafficking for sexual exploitation is a high priority issue for the

Swedish Government and it is addressed and also included in the work to combat men's violence against women. The work is also further an integral part of the Swedish feminist foreign policy.

Prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes are ruthless and cynical exploitation of other people. It is a serious violation of the individual's human value and the right to decide over his or her own life. It is also a major obstacle to social equality, gender equality, and the opportunity to enjoy human rights. In order to end exploitation and prostitution and also trafficking for sexual exploitation, we need to address the core root cause of this exploitation namely the demand. We need to acknowledge that sexual exploitation and trafficking exist due to the fact that someone, namely the demand, is paying for it.

The Swedish model, which is now more and more being referred to as the Equality Model, comes from the fact that we have this legislation since 1999 against the purchase of sexual services. We have this legislation in order to change norms in society and also stop all forms of exploitation.

We have had a session yesterday of CSW66 session together with Israel on the Equality Model, where we presented the work of Sweden and Israel, in our respective legislations. We also had UN Women, UNODC, the OSCE, also survivor leaders with us in the event, to talk about the importance to address the demand and the fact that all Member States, all States, that

have signed the UN protocol to suppress trafficking, have an obligation to address the demand independently of national legislation.

Sweden has an abolitionist approach to trafficking and to prostitution and the Swedish view is that prostitution causes harm both to the individuals involved and to the society at large. And not least it affects gender equality negatively. As we are aware, prostitution is a highly gendered issue: men are the predominant purchasers of sexual services, users, or victims, whether those services are being provided by women, girls, LGBTBI people, men and boys and most people in prostitution are women.

This session that we have here today and the fact that we discussing this is now even more pertinent due to the aggressive Russian invasion in Ukraine where we also now have people from Ukraine being at risk of trafficking and also being further exploited in prostitution in Europe today. So we also have to be vigilant to make sure that children and women are not being exploited for trafficking for different purposes, but also sexual exploitation and prostitution. This is a very important topic, that will be discussed now.

By exclusively targeting the demand, Sweden aims at disrupting the market, while at the same time equalising an inherent power imbalance between men and women. This exploitation, people in prostitution, need solid exit strategies, support, and rights to alternative livelihoods. And regulating and normalising

this exploitation as sex work is not an option. But of course, a ban that we have in Sweden for the buying of sexual services can only be a complement to social efforts. We need to have social efforts present and we also need to work very much with changing norms in society. We have seen in Sweden the legislation we have had since 1999 has a normative effect on society. There is also strong support among the general population for the legislation, but we currently, we always need to remind and work with changing norms, also including men and boys in the work to address the causes of violence, address the demand, talk about negative social and gender stereotypes that are causing exploitation in prostitution and trafficking. For example, Sweden has also included this: the government has changed the school curricula for the Comprehensive sexuality education in schools in order to equip boys and girls with the understanding that sex should be based on consent and free will. Universal prevention measures are indeed needed.

It is positive to see that several other countries with Sweden, that we have more countries in the world now that are implementing this model and of course, we are working very closely with France and you will soon hear from my French colleague, what we are also implementing different activities together, which is very important.

In this work, there is a work very important that you also mentioned Claire, the fact that we need to listen to victims, hear their voices, survivors' voices, and their

recommendations should guide us on the policy that we should implement.

I need to say something on terminology, Sweden works on a common understanding and consensus on the terminology that is based on human rights, based on the UNTOC, the CEDAW Convention, and also General Assembly agreed language. And we have to respect internationally agreed language and terminology in order to make sure that we are protecting the most vulnerable groups. "Sex work" is not mentioned in any international instrument. And very few countries have legalised prostitution as work. "Sex work" does not reflect on the abuse and exploitation of people in prostitution and the fact that a high number are victims of trafficking. Sweden is opposed to the use of this terminology that normalises prostitution as work and that also supports legalisation or even decriminalisation of the whole industry. We need to decriminalize people in prostitution of course, but not decriminalising the buyers. In Sweden, we prefer to use the terminology "people in prostitution" that is inclusive and not condemning and also not taking a blind eye to the fact that many people in prostitution want to leave prostitution and are also touchily linked to trafficking.

Thank you so much.

**Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Thank you, Ambassador, for providing your perspective, with the example of the Swedish model. It was also very important

that you highlight the fact that Sweden does not recognise the terminology of “sex work” and that you are fully committed to defending and promoting this agreed in the international area, it is very important.

I will now leave the floor to your French counterpart, ambassadors Jean-Claude Brunet, ambassador-at-large against transnational criminal threats of France. Merci beaucoup d'être avec nous aujourd'hui et je vous laisse la parole.

#### **Mr Jean-Claude BRUNET, Ambassador-at-Large against Transnational Criminal Threats of France**

Good morning, good morning Claire, thank you very much. I am happy to participate in this exchange today. Like my colleague from Sweden and all the other panelists, I would really like to thank CAP International, with the support of the missions and other partner organizations, for organizing this exchange on an extremely important topic and urgent action to defend the victims of this criminal activity.

I am also pleased to participate in this exchange particularly in the context of the CSW, with organizations from the world of labor, to effectively make the messages that we are carrying my Swedish colleague and myself, our 2 countries, our 2 ministers, so that we can truly highlight all the dimensions, as you have mentioned Claire, of the implications of this criminal activity and the need to protect the victims. And those who will speak out about their situation and their experience, give us a

message and a energy to be able to commit, to act and answer.

My colleague also mentioned the issues related to Ukraine now. The European Commissioner, Mrs. Johansson, noted in a speech to the European Parliament a few days ago our concern and how upset we have all been over the last two weeks about half of the refugees are minors. Among these minors, children are not accompanied, they are on their own. It could be sexual exploitation or forced labour. This is really a threat for these refugees. Not only in this region, unfortunately, but it's the risk in many migration situations, where people are in a fragile situation, where they are vulnerable. So, criminal networks treats human beings, use human beings and take advantage of these populations for their unfortunate criminal activity that is sadly very profitable. It is against these issues that the abolitionist model that our 2 countries, Sweden, France but followed by many other countries, have retained.

In the framework of France, it is the step of the law of April 13, 2016, which aims to reinforce the fight against the prostitution system and to accompany prostitutes. This policy is part of the French inter-ministerial strategy to fights against trafficking. This is a national action plan to fight against human trafficking that is carried out by an inter-ministerial division, with the support of all ministries. The Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, which I represent, provides our support and cooperation in partner regions, particularly in Africa and South-East Europe. But also in the multilateral

framework, as we are doing today in the CSW, we want to help the legislative models that will provide solutions.

The French and Swedish Ministers of Foreign Affairs, for the 8th of March 2019 for the International Women's Rights Day, have launched this common tribune strategy and this joint Franco-Swedish initiative to promote actions to fight against sexual exploitation which, in fact, affects in the world 2/3 of the victims, women and children. It is a true feminist diplomacy and defending equality between women and men that we act. It is in the protection of victims, their dignity and their fundamental rights and the fight against exploitation by criminal networks increasingly violent, against these women and girls in particular, that we have inscribed our common strategy.

As my colleague has mentioned, we are developing actions to promote the abolitionist model, but also broader policies against sexual exploitation bilaterally, regionally or multilaterally. And particularly, as was already mentioned, to ensure the consistency of the actions and language. The numbers are very clear and mentioned the victims, specifically women and young girls. But another figure has to be taken into consideration. It is the fact that over 60% in the world, this is a worldwide study, between 60% and 70%, on average in the world, of prostitutes are victims of human trafficking and criminal networks. But in many countries like mine, in France, this figure is 90%. So that also explains, that's one of the reasons why we are moving to the abolitionist model in

France. Because the reality of prostitution is that 90% of these people are victims of criminal networks that are increasingly violent, reaching victims who are increasingly vulnerable. At 70% and even more, I believe, 80%, are foreign origin. Prostituted people are in fact recruited, exploited by networks through an immigration setting that I mentioned, therefore in situations where the psychological hold, physical hold, material hold, the violence perpetrated against them is on a staggering increase and it's unacceptable. There is no respect of their basic human rights, and it is this a reality that led us to take the step.

What I would like to point out is the feedback because since 2016, of course, Sweden has much longer feedback, but we already have interesting feedback. So, for almost 6 years now that this law has been enforced, it is a law that, as in Sweden, but also perhaps with an extension of the scope of actions, which is intended with a triple objective: to prevent and raise awareness among citizens as regards the demand, which is provided by the United Nations protocol to combat human trafficking. We impose fines on the demand, we also develop actions of sensitization, of education in the school settings and the educational system.

The other goal of the law is to prosecute the perpetrators and to decriminalize prostitution itself. On the other hand, increasing pressure on the criminal networks, there are about twenty of them every year in France which are dismantled. The first objective is really to protect and



support the victims and provide them an exit of the prostitution system. And this is also, compared to the previous model, of other abolitionist countries, an extremely interesting component of the French law with extremely positive feedback because since the implementation of the law, we already have about 450 victims who have benefited from these exit programs, organized at the departmental level by all the divisions concerned. Helping them to get out of the prostitution system and giving them other opportunities for employment for decent work. It is a real success because 85% of these people maintained their new jobs or decent work conditions that they were able to obtain since 2016.

Concerning the action on clients, we can say that there are interesting effects because there has been a deterrent effect. Street prostitution has been considerably reduced. And then there are about 1000 fines per year and very few repeat offences. So, the implementation of the law is having some effect, it's recent, it's new, but it's worth pointing out.

There's a survey in the public opinion that shows that the public supports at 78%, the public approves of the law and the approach. That's what I wanted to say in addition to my colleague, Ambassador Anna EKSTEDT.

In conclusion, I would really like to emphasize the importance of this law in relation to this abolitionist model, in relation to the link with the world of labor, the world of decent work. This is the whole issue when you have 90% of persons in

prostitution in a country who are victims of organized criminal networks that are increasingly violent, that it is a totally unacceptable exploitation in regard of fundamental rights. You do not have the possibility to recognize this activity as a "normal work" and on the contrary, it is the priority of priorities, with also forced labor, child labor, as it is the case in the French policy today. Human trafficking through sexual exploitation is one of the main priorities in the fight against organized crime. It is also to protect obviously the victims of these violations, their dignity. It is totally natural for us to protect the population and for them, it's also important to hold the sex buyers accountable. We need to reduce demand and to be effective in combatting sex trafficking, human trafficking.

And to conclude, I would like to turn to the victims of human trafficking, and I know that we have in this exchange their testimony and I would like to tell them that we are fully committed to the suffering that people have been through, and we want to make the situation change and turn the trend around, that is too, really too easy for organized crime. We want to be able to combat that more affectively the perpetrators of these crimes.

Thank you very much. Thank you CAP International. I am very happy to participate in this exchange.

**Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Thank you very much Your Excellency for your presentation which sheds a lot of light

on the very positive impacts of the law that were passed in 2016, in terms of representation and reality of people in prostitution system. That is very encouraging to know that people were able to exit.

Thank you very much to the two ambassadors of France & Sweden for their very enriching presentations, also for the cooperation that you are implementing together to also influence other Member States and with a specific focus on this question of consistency in the terminology, and language compared to the UN agreed language. This is a really strong commitment that is very important for us. Thank you again.

And I will now launch our first panel *“Reality and consequences of prostitution: an antithesis of decent work”*.

At CAP International we strongly believe that listening to experts such as representatives of frontline organisations and survivors is really key to understanding what prostitution is and identifying the best ways to eliminate it. We are very grateful to the three advocate leaders that we have with us today: Diane MARTIN, Esohe AGHATISE, and Flora WHITFIELD.

We're going to start with Ms. Diane MARTIN from Scotland. Diane MARTIN is Vice-chair of the international survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council of the OSCE/ODIHR. And I want to share with you that OSCE/ODIHR is co-sponsoring this event and we are very grateful for that. Diane MARTIN has spent over 25 years

supporting women to exit commercial sexual exploitation, including 15 years as a founder and director of a specialist service for women involved in or exited from prostitution and developing a wide range of services. Thanks a lot for being here with us today and over to you.

### **PANEL: REALITY & CONSEQUENCES OF PROSTITUTION, AN ANTITHESIS OF "DECENT WORK"**

**Ms. Diane MARTIN**, Survivor (Scotland), Member of OSCE/ODIHR International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC)

Greetings from Scotland. I've just seen in the chat that 20 prostitution survivor leaders are joining us from the Philippines and that it is just really exciting to know that you are with us today.

Prostitution: is it sex? And is it work?

Yes, sex acts are involved. But it is unwanted sex, which means it's exploitive. Money can't buy consent and we can't consent to our own exploitation. Asked for work, those with a vested interest in it. Often presented as being about labour rights, if we could just get that right, then all would be well. But no, we see that in countries that tried to achieve this, but it has been an utter failure with a very real and unacceptable human cost. Prostitution is not about labour rights, but it is about human rights. And the right not to be for sale.

Language is important and we know the only change along which we use to describe service. It changes how we perceive them. It's the same with prostitution. The narrative of sex work and a job like any other does exactly that. Pushing an agenda of legalisation or full decriminalisation: women are just service providers, and traffickers become managers and facilitators.

And if it is accepted as a job like any other, then why would we need the support system and services that we know are needed to help women leave and recover?

Julie Bindel, the journalist, and women's rights campaigner, rightly states that, and I quote "the inside of a woman's body is not a workplace". Any areas of what the international described as decent work expertise are valued and experienced. A worker can, for example, generally expect higher wages. She highlights that this is not the case in prostitution, where she says the experience has no value and a lack of experience brings in more profit for pimps and traffickers and where the common request is about who is the youngest on offer and if they have new girls.

I remember all too well being asked by clients at age 19 to pretend and say out loud to them that I was 16 years old. It shows that even if there is a certain amount of labour and actual service, it is not a prerequisite for the deal. The minimum condition is only that you have a body temperature. You could be drugged or drunk to the point of unconsciousness, and

you can still be sold. You might participate, but you don't have to. Your body can be used for sexual arts even without your cooperation.

And if this supposed work is so empowering and lucrative, we would expect to see men and women from all spheres of life cheering up for their liberation and path to riches and independence. But no, we all know the reality is that you cannot reframe and sanitise abuse and exploitation, and we all already know that nobody, including those who exposed the "sex workers' work" mantra, wants their daughter subjected to this supposed work.

But if this is work, what are the qualifications? The recruitment process, the training, the occupational hazards? Prostitution as we've hired is highly gendered, where the overwhelming majority are forced recruited, groomed, or trapped there by others or by desperate circumstances. And women and children are overwhelmingly poor from already disadvantaged and marginalised groups, and overwhelmingly women of colour.

In prostitution, women are objects treated as a commodity to be consumed and discarded. In prostitution, are nearly always underlying issues that create the conditions of vulnerability. Most women and girls into prostitution have been paved with these issues, including poverty, childhood sexual abuse, neglect, addiction, or coercive and controlling relationships.

This is why we must rid ourselves of the false dichotomy we're continually presented with. Of course, sex trafficking is bad, and prostitution isn't a choice and isn't a job. Both rely on gender inequality and vulnerability. Both are inherently harmful. But these vulnerabilities are not the cause or the root of prostitution.

For that, we need to shift our focus and ask who creates the demand for this supposed work. Sex buyers create this demand for a subset of women to be exploited. It's entitled to men of every social class, education, and economic status. They make the choice to exploit by renting the bodies of women. If there is no demand, there would be no supply.

And who benefits from this supposed work? It's all about profit and financial gain, but not for those subjected to it. Sex buyers are lining the pockets of pimps, traffickers and organised crime groups are raking in billions of the literal box of women and children.

My professional experience has met years of work supporting women, exploited in street-based prostitution to exit and recover.

In my late teens, I was exploited through prostitution in London and later trafficked to a prostitution ring abroad, ridiculously described as high class. I was sent out by what was described as the safest agency in London. There is nothing high class about being raped, beaten or after gunpoint, if you want to see your mum again, venues from you were luxury hotels, apartments,

and diplomatic accommodation, the clients were highly educated and in positions of power, royal palaces and the homes of government ministers.

It is all the same things. The fear, the violence, and the hopelessness feel the same. As for the desire for safety and a life free of violence. Please believe those of us who've been on the receiving end of this supposed sex, nor that it's one wanted, and that it makes it abuse. To those of you who thought your money paid for consent, we did not want you touching us. It made our skin crawl. We did not want to touch your body. We were all either stating it or past being able to fake it. And you did not care whether you deluded yourself by fake smiles or hollow sounds of pretending pleasure, or whether you saw distress, ignored it, or was sexually gratified by it and did what you wanted to anyway. As soon as we could, we tried to scrub off all traces of you, like if we could wash off the memories easily.

And if this work, this supposed job is just the same old exploitation and violence visited on the bodies of the world's most vulnerable women and children, day in, day out. Exploitation and violence should never be privatized. It should be exposed, and those inflict in harm, those creating the conditions for it to flourish should be criminalised and held accountable.

How long are survivors will have to be saying the same thing, fighting the same fight, pleading with governments and those with power and authority?

Well, the answer is as long as we have to. It can be exhausting and there is a cost to it, but we will do it. Because we know the much larger cost is being paid right now by those still exploited, right now by those being brimmed, and, right now by those who've managed to get away but don't know how to start to recover and rebuild their lives.

As individuals, we have a duty not to turn away, but to turn towards and face the realities of prostitution. To see and to name this violent exploitation for what it is, and estates we must enact the international agreements and obligations we've already signed up to. In conclusion, I know that all of you here today on the panel and listening at home, or at your workplace, want to make a difference. If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.

So what is your sphere of influence? What is your expertise? What can you do? A good starting point is to thoroughly examine the reality of prostitution: which is unwanted sex, violence, and exploitation. Prostitution: Neither sex nor work. Thank you.

**Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Thank you so much. It was really moving, really powerful and very, very strong. I totally agree with you. And also, I want to say “Hi” to the other survivors who have joined us today. You’ve said it is actually the reality of what prostitution is and the fact that we have to see it, to name it properly. And of course, we have to fight it. So thank you for your call for action. I hope

your it will be heard by a broader audience than this event. I am sure it will be.

Thank you so much and I will now leave the floor to Esohe AGHATISE, who is the founder and executive director of Iroko Onlus, which is based in Italy and Nigeria. We are very proud to count on Iroko as a CAP member. Iroko provides direct services to victims of trafficking, to establish independent and dignified life. Thank you very much for being with us today, and the floor is yours.

**Ms. Esohe AGHATISE, Founder and Executive Director of Iroko Onlus (Italy, Nigeria)**

Thank you very much Claire, distinguished guests and members often under the panelists, and thank you so much, Diane, for that extremely impactful presentation that has cost quite a lot of the things that we see in our work.

We work with victims of sex trafficking predominantly and also with victims of sexual violence. And what we have learned is that when people, when women end up in the prostitution industry is because they don't have a choice. There's nothing about choice in the prostitution industry. When you find that women are economically, politically, and socially advanced, and they have access to a good life, they have access to the basic needs of life, they do not make that so-called choice to go into prostitution. Prostitution is linked to situations of vulnerability and the overwhelming majority, and we are talking about, at the very least, the 99% of those

who are in the prostitution industry, end there not out of choice but out of the lack of an alternative, out of the lack of a possibility for them to have a life, for them to access work.

Prostitution is not work, so there is not even a question of describing it as indecent. It is not work, it is violence. And from the evidence we have had from those who know, from those who had that experience, we know that it is violence.

We know that from research that has been carried out in different parts of the world, prostituted women are at least 40% more at risk of dying violently than normal people, than people in normal life who don't have that kind of experience. I'm not saying that they are not normal people and saying, that they go through some extremely difficult situations because they have no choice because they end up in this kind of situation.

And we are working very hard to bring in the abolitionist policies both in Italy and Nigeria.

Working as a member of CAP, we have been able to bring together a lot of the abolitionist organisations in Italy. We have created the Italian abolitionist network. We are working with members of the Italian Parliament to ensure that the abolitionist law is brought also to Italy and happily, a draft bill was recently submitted by the Member of Parliament, the Senator, that we are working with.

In Nigeria, we also working trying to bring that kind of situation, though it is still at the beginning, to ensure that the Nigerian government would also look at protecting its people by refusing to allow prostitution, a violent activity, to be seen as work or to be passed into law as work. And that is part of the work that we, as Iroko, have been doing.

I would like to also touch on the way that, in recent times, prostitution has been considered, especially in a very important decision of the Italian Constitutional Court in March of 2019.

According to the Court, abolitionist principles are what should be installed in all countries to counter the violence of prostitution. And the Court recognised the fact that the person who sells sexual services is potentially a victim and the aggressor, the country recognises society as the aggressor, and so it asked the State not to be a part of the sex industry, which puts half of its population on sale to the other half. And the Court also recognised the fact that entry into the circuit of prostitution is extremely difficult to exit, that due to pressure, due to blackmail, due to physical violence, due to the compulsion to undergo unwanted sexual acts, and contagion resulting from unprotected sexual intercourse, we heard the very, very impactful and important intervention of Diane earlier, where she spoke about all of what is involved, in what people want to make us believe is work. And the Court said even in times when we say it is not forced prostitution, the choice – so-called choice - to sell sex finds its root in the vast majority

of cases in factors that condition and limit the freedom of self-determination of the individual. And so the legislation needs to recognise that prostitution cannot be considered work, because of the basis on which it starts.

We know that sex trafficking is the end product of prostitution. Sex trafficking cannot exist if prostitution does not exist. So we cannot, on one hand, talk about eliminating sex trafficking, while at the same time, we are promoting prostitution as a job, prostitution as employment. It cannot because there are two sides to the same coin. One exists as a result of the other.

And that is why it is so important that we begin to talk about the abolitionist model. That is why it is so important that Members of Parliament Learn more about it because what we have also found out, is that a lot of those in positions of having an impact on changing the law are not really that well informed about what prostitution is. There is this general acceptance of the general idea of prostitution as inevitable. It is not inevitable, is a little bit like the way slavery used to be. Once Upon a time, slavery was seen as acceptable. That's the way that prostitution should be seen now, as something that is not acceptable. In Europe, there is a lot of talk about gender equality, about the same kind of rights for men and women.

But how can you have gender equality when half of the population is put on sale to the other half. So you cannot put people's bodies on sale and then talk about

them being equal to the others. It is not possible. And so the Italian constitutional court also said that. Prostitution does not give dignity. Prostitution is something that dehumanises and debases the human body and so cannot be accepted as a work activity and cannot be accepted by law, as something that anyone should be encouraged to enter into. And so, for us in Iroko, and as members of CAP, we are doing our best to ensure that this is passed into law. So please don't call it "work". It is violence. Thank you.

#### **Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Thank you very much Esohe for sharing your perspective analysis and also for all the activities you are conducting both in Italy and Nigeria, specifically also the advocacy work you are doing. We are very happy to hear that there are some beginning of developments also in Nigeria and we know that in Italy this is quite promising. So thank you very much for your commitment.

I will now leave the floor to Flora WHITFIELD, Survivor and Communications and Program Manager for Breaking Free (USA). We are also very proud to count on Breaking free as one of our CAP members in the US. Breaking Free helps over 500 women a year to escape systems of prostitution and sexual exploitation through advocacy, direct services, housing, and education. Flora, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Flora WHITFIELD**, Survivor, Communications and Program Manager for Breaking Free (USA)

Thank you. Hello, my name is Flora WHITFIELD, and thank you for the introduction. I want to say thank you to Miss Diane for the presentation and the presenter that just presented as well.

Here, at Breaking free, we have been serving the community since 1996 and we are a non-profit organisation. We are serving individuals escaping systems of commercial sexual exploitation, prostitution, and sex trafficking by providing direct services from supportive housing and support groups and advocacy by addressing the demand, we have seen a tremendous impact within our community.

Sex work, prostitution, or anything of that nature is not considered real work. And what I mean by that, is it's not a credible profession, it's an oppression of any individual that is being affected by this. Let's look at it like this for instance: what professional setting have you known of that is inflicted by prolonged, cruel, or unjust treatment? Probably not meaning. So the reality of this being considered appropriate or decent work is a total lie. The deception of the sex industry and sex work being sex-positive is a false advertisement of what the realities are that these individuals suffered through every day. And for those who have been traumatised by this in the past.

It is unfair. It is unfair for anyone to project the false implications of what these individuals face each and every day. Rather, if it's survival, this is still not a choice. No one chooses prostitution. It's a lack of choices, a lack of barriers, that are

created in this vicious cycle of exploitation, manipulation, and deception. There is nothing glamorous or empowering by the fact that a person is being objectified and being used as a commodity for the sake of someone else's sexual pleasures.

This is a choice of no choice. No one chooses to be used and abused. And I don't care how much money an individual is making for the simple fact that is, if the money was not there, she or he would not be there. It's paid rate. It's simply put. No women and girls want to be prostituted or be bamboos or answer this false sense of real what has been billed to them. No one wants to be objectified for someone else's sexual use rather than being seen as a person with the independence to make their own decisions making, that is not empowering. Sex work is not empowering.

Sites like Only fans, Pink is there encouraging and normalising young women and girls to commodify themselves, which places them in the mindset to view themselves as objects, which can then be exchanged for money and goods. That is a clear example of sexual objectification.

When we start to live in this mindset, it can cancel out all the other qualities that we have, which sets us apart from the rest of our society and communities and our families and friends. So we may begin to isolate, self-medicate, self-sabotage, and self-destruct because there is no way anyone can endure being used and abused over and over and manipulated and lied to. That makes you feel inhuman. That creates



a huge barrier within internally and externally and creates isolation and pain among many other barriers. We can openly discuss how great our jobs are when we are “in the life” or how fantastic the benefits are, or how about taking our children to work. That's not a thing, because it's not a legit job, it's not “work”. It's violence against women and no one should be bought and sold. We are not items. There is nothing empowering about that.

Sexuality versus sexualization. Now let's take a moment to think about how society has promoted the over-sexualization of young women and girls, which promotes them to express themselves sexually in an unhealthy manner, adapting to what has been normalised, pushes us to focus on the aspects we see: the person's values come from only their sexual appeal or behavior, which excludes her from all her other amazing characteristics. Basically, to me this means that a woman has been valued based on her beauty, external appearance, being over-sexualised, and also the behaviors that come along with it. This has been more fights in the media, on all social media platforms. If you take a second and scroll through your phone, I'm pretty sure you will see apps like TikTok and Facebook and you will discover that women and young girls are being overly sexualised in videos and photos, even targeting young girls and boys. The number one search topic on pornography sites is “teens”, “tweens”, and “young girls”. This is an alarming issue that the porn industry is having a huge impact on today's dating, unhealthy sex, and unhealthy relationships.

Young women and girls have been sexualised and this is not empowering. It is not empowering to see that they are not being empowered with their beauty and not their intelligence and not being taught to utilise their transferable skills. For me this is problematic. And not empowering. Here's a quote from a survivor: *“every time I will pull something on my only fans page, they would say ‘that's good, but it's not enough. And I felt that I had to keep getting more and more extreme. And I kept telling myself I was in power, only to pretend and I would smile in those pictures, but I wasn't happy. And I was doing things like a robot”*. Personally, I can agree with that. Does that sound empowering to you?

In today's generation, the sexualization of women has been trending. Some people may even agree that sites like Only fans or porn sites, escorting, sex work, et cetera, are sexual liberation. The birth of sexual liberation began in 1986. That is not what that was designed for. It was designed for women to freely express their needs without judgment, but not in the way to be sold as objects. The recruitment, grooming, and facilitating of enslavement of individuals in this lifestyle creates a lifelong healing process that is dehumanising and there is nothing professional about it.

If you could take anything away from this event today, just know that this is not a choice. Prostitution is violence against women, and we need to be intentional about educating our children and bringing awareness, and walking alongside all of our survivors in support, in any capacity that

we can. My call to action is for you to get connected with all your local or national agencies and kick connected with their work and collaborate network and get the stories out there.

Thank you for your time and I appreciate CAP for inviting Breaking Free out to share our experience. Thank you.

### **Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Thank you, Flora, for your very strong testimony showing the lifelong impacts on the life of the victims, showing how it's unfair or prostitution unfair, how to consider it as work is unfair, and also the link with the other sexualisation of young women and girls today. Thank you to the three of you, I believe that your three speeches have been really appreciated if I see the comments in the discussion. And I can also share my appreciation because it was strong, really moving, and really inspiring. And I really hope that so your call for action will be heard widely.

I will now launch our second panel on *“The concept of “sex work”, a violation of the rights of all women workers”* with representatives of 3 trade unions. Unions are of course key stakeholders for social justice and against all forms of exploitation so they are key in this debate on why prostitution cannot be considered a work.

So we are very grateful to the three Unions who joint our efforts today: the French Confédération Générale des travailleurs, Sentro & IUF Asia Pacific - among the firsts who have joined our campaign that aims at mobilising unions to promote decent work.

We will start right now with Sabine REYNOSA, Representative of the French Union Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), and Member of the working group « Femmes-Mixité ». You were already with us two days ago for an important event at the Spanish Parliament, thanks a lot for your availability and support! The floor is yours.

### **PANEL: THE CONCEPT OF "SEX WORK", A VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF ALL WOMEN WORKERS**

**Ms. Sabine REYNOSA**, Member of the Collective « Femmes-Mixité » of Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), France

Thank you very much for the invitation. Hello ladies and gentlemen, hello to everyone.

Since you mention Spain, I would like to start by pointing out that at the moment, a law on “sexual freedom” is currently being debated in Parliament. An amendment could allow the criminalisation of all forms of pimping, and in the process, the abolition of prostitution, which would correspond to the electoral commitments of the majority party.

To come to my trade union CGT, I wanted to sum up our abolitionist commitment, at the CGT that it essentially stems from two facts: First of all, it's the struggle against all forms of exploitation and the theorization of the roles and functions that are different

between men and women. It encloses them into hierarchical identities. In this case, this idea that women are objects of men's desires is the basis of sexist and sexual violence in and out of work. And this can only perpetuate gender inequalities, as was already mentioned.

This abolitionist position displayed by the CGT since 2013 was the only one possible, in line with the principles and values we defend as trade union organization, in line with the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons ratified by France in 1960 and finally in line with the French civil code, which establishes that the human body is inviolable and that it is forbidden to commercialize it.

Thus, in France, there is a consensus on the prohibition of the sale of organs, which stems from the more general principle of safeguarding the dignity of people which has constitutional value, and it is opposed to the law of the market. This is the basis of the prohibition of slavery.

A project for a society cannot be built on the sum of a few individual consents, especially when these consents go against fundamental principles.

These questions in fact are ethical, but also legal in terms of social law. Our position is also in line with the interests of employees who benefit from rules that protect the most vulnerable and build a common life project. As a trade union organization, we must defend the standards conquered through struggles regarding decent work

and we cannot derogate from the reference criteria adopted by the ILO. But let's look at the reality of prostitution. Let's listen to the stories of survivors. Let's look at the figures. Let's confront them with the arguments of the prostitution lobby.

A worker sells work time, she sells labour power. She does not sell her body or her intimacy. To claim that one can rent one's body is tantamount to the crime of rape. In prostitution, the human body is made available, it is the very objective of the "service", violence, and abuse, and to support them would become an extension of professional competence. In employment relationship, the employee is subordinate to the employer, that is true, he or she must obey the directives and do the work required, of course. But the employer does not have all rights.

It is true that the body is mobilized in the work activities. It is true that it is often mistreated, but this is the effect of the execution of the work, it is not the objective. Social legislation imposes limits on the relationship of subordination as well as obligations regarding health and safety at work.

To admit that a "client" can come to possess a human body opens a breach in this conception and questions the very notion of the work relationship. This weakens all labour legislation, and not only for women.

What is sold to us as a "progressive" conception is the supreme stage of capitalism that seeks to impose itself in all

dimensions of our lives, leading us to apprehend our bodies and minds as mere raw materials.

The ultra-liberal ideology of prostitution is based on the myth of consent, which is based on the fiction of an egalitarian relationships between prostituted and prostituors. As trade unionists, we see every day that a person in a situation of vulnerability and or economic dependence, is willing to accept in order to survive. As soon as a person in a situation of power exerts coercion, violence, domination or exploitation of any kind on another, consent is biased. The protection of the exploited person is necessary, and the sanction of oppressor is legitimate, hence also the prohibition of sexual harassment.

Thus, Europe and many countries in the world have created legislation that prohibits, in the workplace and in society in general, forcing a sexual act in anyway shape or form in exchange for anything. This is called “sexual harassment”.

The latest convention adopted almost unanimously at the ILO extends and strengthens the protections.

By what artifice of language does the regulation of prostitution manage to define an outlaw territory where men could continue to have access to the bodies of the most precarious women? Because the recourse to prostitution requires, by definition, the solicitation of an act of a sexual nature. Therefore, recognizing prostitution as a legal activity blurs the line between sexual harassment and

solicitation of a person in a context of a so-called “economic activity”. This makes it even more difficult for victims to be recognized as such.

To speak of "sex workers' rights" is a euphemism for the rights of pimps and prostitution consumers. It is an artefact of language to present this vestige of the most archaic patriarchy as modern, subversive, liberating, and even feminist.

While the discourse served to the conservative invokes a contractual relationship of private law between consenting persons, without any intervention of the society.

The idea that prostitution is a job like any other has been used to justify the legalization of a highly lucrative activity, supported by so-called “sex workers' unions”.

All over Europe, the same model with website, online activity, and impressive media presence and of course, promotion of porn, the ideology that feeds the system.

These groups do not support any demands that would go against the interests of the industry's bosses. I mean, the pimps, of course. No denunciation of the “working conditions”, nor of the trafficking, nor of the brutal death of those they claim to defend: who finances them? who makes them live? what are their statutes? what social conflicts have they carried?

The real unions, which have tried to organize the people in prostitution, have not been successful. And for good reason.

These people don't want to stay in prostitution. They don't declare themselves as such, they don't assert a professional identity, neither do they increase their skills as they gain experience in the sector.

Besides, it has been said: who would be proud to direct their daughter towards this type of opportunity?

As trade unionists, it is time to take ownership of the issue and unite around an abolitionist position. The situation of women arriving from Ukraine and being picked up by prostitutes makes abolition more urgent than ever, as I already mentioned. Thank you very much.

#### **Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Thank you, Sabine, for your very powerful analysis that shows that prostitution is not a working agreement, that shows that there is no real consent, that shows the blurred line between harassment and prostitution and that these so-called sex workers unions that are not really unions.

I will now leave the floor to Dr Muhammad Hidayat GREENFIELD, Regional Secretary of International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tourism, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) Asia Pacific. Thank you very much for being with us today, also considering how late this is for you! The floor is yours.

**Dr Muhammad Hidayat GREENFIELD**, Regional Secretary of International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant,

Catering, Tourism, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) Asia Pacific

Thank you, Claire. I just want to start by saying thank you to CAP international for inviting me to speak. As an international trade unionist, I join you today in full support of the struggle to abolish prostitution and with tremendous respect for the survivors and solidarity to all of you. It is absolutely essential that this is a trade union agenda to support this struggle, to be part of the struggle, and in many cases, to be central to it.

Let me begin by talking about this notion of "sex work" – and I refer to prostitution. But let's deal with this concept of sex work in relation to decent work.

First of all, I want to talk about decent work. Decent work is not a description of work – being good jobs vs. bad jobs, decent vs. indecent. Decent work is about workers aspiration and the fulfilment of their rights. According to the ILO, this is the official definition and I quote: *"decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men."*

That is the definition of decent work and everything that we have heard today is the

opposite of that. With all of these preconditions, regardless of how dangerous, difficult, or underpaid, all work can become decent work. But the so-called “sex work” cannot, because the selling of women for sexual use and exploitation cannot be considered work. The preconditions for “sex work” are poverty, debt, a lack of social protection, insecurity, marginalization, displacement by conflict and war, and trafficking. This is what forces women into prostitution. It is compulsion, not choice.

“Sex work” cannot become decent because the so-called “sex industry” *needs* the economic, social and physical vulnerability of women and girls. It is part of their business model. It is a resource. And bringing an end to the economic – as Diane said, “cutting of the demand”, castrating the demand - would bring an *end* to the “sex industry” itself.

To argue that prostitution is work is to argue that it is comparable to any other form of waged work. Work is selling your labour-power in exchange for a wage. This mental and physical labour-power produces a product or service. Yet in “sex work”, what is sold is not a woman’s mental and physical labour-power, but herself. *She* is the commodity. *She* is the product that is consumed. This precludes all the preconditions for decent work. And it cannot be called work.

Prostitution as an industry is allowed or encouraged to operate, generating massive economic wealth, criminal profits. But the exploitation of women in this

industry to create that profit is not employment. Women are not employed to provide a service - selling their labour-power for a wage -, they are the product, as we have heard today. And it is therefore not employment, but the enslavement of women and girls, reinforced by their patriarchal treatment of them as commodities, as property. It is impossible to ensure access to rights so integral to decent work because goods - commodities, products – do not have rights. And this underpins again the business logic of this criminal enterprise.

The notion of prostitution as “sex work” is contingent on the claim that she has *chosen* this employment. It is her choice. This ignores all the force and compulsion we referred to earlier. The deliberate and systematic exploitation of the economic, social and physical vulnerability of women and girls, due to poverty, debt and displacement, produces force. Not choice.

In our work on modern slavery in the fisheries industry, we have rescued fishers from trafficking and forced labour. I have not once heard any government, company, union or NGO suggest that he was on that boat by choice. They recognize that for reasons of poverty, debt and displacement he was on that boat – through no choice of his own – and subjected to horrendous and degrading treatment. Why do these same organizations suggest that women exploited in prostitution made a *choice*? And what happened to our outrage at horrendous and degrading treatment?

The only way in which we could possibly consider that any choice occurred is if all the preconditions of force and compulsion are eliminated. What does that mean? That must mean that there is no poverty, no debt, no displacement, no trafficking, no forced labor, and that all the vulnerability of women and girls is gone – and to add, as Diane said, the demand is eliminated.

But that means there must be social protection for all, health for all, freedom from debt. We actually have to have a comprehensive social protection system that the UN General Secretary called for in September last year and eradicate all poverty. We have to create jobs, guarantee a living wage, and ensure that *everyone* has access to the universal human right to housing, education, food and nutrition as guaranteed in the UN Declaration on Human Rights. Only then is it even possible to have a discussion about whether *choices* are being made.

But we are so far from this condition. And now because of this economic crisis, war, and conflict, we face increasing poverty, debt and displacement in the next decade. That means increased vulnerability of millions of women and girls. It means increased exploitation of women and girls in prostitution.

As the global tourism industry recovers – and you heard in the introduction that our union has also organizations in the tourism sector - with the promise to “build back better”, governments, resort owners and tourism industry operators will once again encourage and promote prostitution as a

tourist attraction – as entertainment. There is no doubt that this so-called sex tourism will be a driver of foreign exchange earnings and business recovery in many countries. Women and girls exploited in this sex tourism will remain poor and kept poor because the industry needs them to be poor; that is how they reproduce their products, through this perpetuate permanent vulnerability. It is impossible to cannot see that this is not work and it cannot be decent work.

Article 23 of the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* refers to the right to earn an income that ensures “*an existence worthy of human dignity.*” What happens when earning that income forcibly rips away your dignity and - by treating you as a product, as property, as a commodity- tries to take away your humanity too? Survivors have courageously struggled to recover their human dignity by escaping trafficking and prostitution and helping others to do so. Calling prostitution “sex work” denigrates that courageous struggle and simply casts doubt on our own humanity and human dignity. Thank you.

#### **Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Thank you so much for your analysis and also for recalling the international standards, the ILO definition of decent work and the Universal Declaration for Human Rights, for highlighting the structural needs of this industry for vulnerable women and girls and for poverty. I also find your example very enlightening, your comparison with the forced Labour and why do we question the

choice only in the case of sexual exploitation. So thank you very much for all of that.

I will now hand over to Josua MATA, General-Secretary of Sentro Union, Philippines. Thank you for your support and for being here – this is also very late for you! Over to you.

**Mr. Josua MATA, General-Secretary of Sentro Union, Philippines**

Thank you very much Claire and thank you to CAP for your invitation. It is indeed an honour for me to be part of this event.

Our work against prostitution in the Philippines, but particularly in my organisation Sentro, is part and parcel before work for equality. We can't have real equality so long as they are these people who are reduced to selling their bodies to survive. That's the starting point of Sentro's perspective on this.

I have started of working full time for the Philippine labour movement three decades ago. It was a very large movement. I distinctly remember the time the early 90s, when it was normal for women leaders to be heckled even before they can express their opinions during our congresses.

Today in our Union, that's not a longer possible. After a long struggle, women are taking over leadership roles, even in sectors that are almost entirely dominated by men, like, for example, in the informal transport sector. And they are proving to be far better, far more committed than their male counterparts. Today, even the

macho leaders among us, and I'm afraid that there are still those dinosaurs with us, would never dare other a sexist joke inside our organisation.

Now, how is this possible? Let me share several insights.

First, consistent with our principles, it was the women themselves who led the way in forcing change in our movement. It was a women leader's that stand the work for equality, despite the overpowering machismo in our movement.

Of course, it also helped that there were men who were converted to feminism. I used to think, frankly, I used to think that they're being a socialist would be enough to write all the wrongs in the world until I was invited by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Asia Pacific, where I first heard a gender sensitivity training to address demand of prostitution.

It was in that training where I was forced to confront my own machismo. And then and it was there when I realised that transforming society will never be complete without dismantling the gender process created by patriarchy.

This is why we adopted gender sensitivity training as part of our education ladder. We think within the stated WHT Pacific for exporting to us the GST module. This module includes discussion on gender sensitivity, violence against women including prostitution and redefining sexuality.



For me, it is one of the most revolutionary trainings that we have in our education arsenal. I saw young men transformed after hearing the testimony of a survivor of prostitution on how disruptive the nexus of capitalism and patriarchy is. With tears in their eyes, they apologised to the survivors, in behalf of other men who look down women and have condemned the practice of buying women.

We also incorporated this module in our efforts to organise migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, Macau, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and lately Taiwan and Korea. Today our migrant domestic workers organisations in these countries are actively advocating against trafficking and prostitution.

But more than the margin, we also owe a lot to the women survivors organised by Coalition against trafficking in Women Asia Pacific, for continuously inspiring us. They are one of the best organisers in the world and a lot of them are actually here with us tonight. So “kudos” to all of them. Thank you. And I salute you all.

Now for Sentro, we realised early on that forming women's committees are important. But it is still important for us, but we also realise that it can be a convenient way for actual leaders to sideline women leaders and containing their voices, slightly thing the women did busy in the kitchen while decision making is actually done in the main room.

This is why our women leaders emphasise not just the building of women's

committees, but they create a feminist movement within the labour movement.

This requires, of course, developing more women leaders who are willing and ready to take on bigger and bigger roles. This requires discussing the radical socialism and feminism.

With new women leaders, Sentro Women is now at the forefront of our union struggle for equality. And it is part and parcel of our work. And it includes their application of prostitution.

Now we were able to read a number of victories in terms of social policies and legislation, even if we continue to advance women's welfare at the local level.

But let me focus on our work, what we have done so far in our work in prostitution.

First, as early as 2006, we adopted a policy on sexual harassment and anti-prostitution. In Sentro, anyone proven to be buying women in prostitution will be expelled. We campaign it all around. Specially among transport workers to reject the practise. It is mandatory that this resolution is explained in all our major trainings and activities.

Our migrant domestic workers union, as I have mentioned in Hong Kong and Singapore, were also able to handle cases of prostitution and sexual harassment, and not just among migrant domestic workers themselves.

We have had numerous activities with survivors of prostitution, and thanks to the CATW as well. And listening to them, working with them in campaigning against violence against women, especially for the passage of an anti-prostitution bill that will strengthen penalties against buyers and institutionalised support services, especially exit programmes for prostituted women.

Recently, we successfully campaigned for the passage of safe spaces out which criminalises sexual harassment, and this, even as we are contesting, we are resisting an authoritarian government led by Mr Duterte. We supported the senator that passes the law to remove the criminalization of women, victims, and survivors of prostitution.

But we still have daunting challenges ahead. The rise of authoritarianism in our country and misogyny is threatening to roll back the gains of the movement. Not only do we have to fight the normalisation of misogyny among men, we also have to engage women who buy into patriarchal values. We need to battle the persistent peddling of the idea of sex work, especially among those work supposed to be progressives, not only in the Philippines, but even abroad.

I am a trade unionist. Our job is to make work decent. And brother Hidayat has already clearly explained that making prostitution decent is not possible. I cannot imagine how I can negotiate an agreement that would make prostitution decent when

in fact prostitution is one of the worst forms of violence against women.

So as long as there is patriarchy and capitalism, women will always be commodified, and that is the biggest challenge that we continue to face. Indeed, we still have a long way to go, but I believe that our future as a movement would depend on how effectively we can institutionalise equality in our movement.

In a country that threaten to be overwhelmed by authoritarianism, the struggle for equality is as important as the struggle to deepen democracy. In both cases, we recognise that there are no shortcuts. We need to sustain the spade work of educating our ranks and mobilising them against all forms of oppression, including prostitution.

And finally, I really believe that as long as the trade union movement, the global labour movement and all the labour movements in every country would not take prostitution and sex trafficking and the fight for equality as one of the most important struggles that we are facing, then I think the road ahead would be much, much harder for all of us.

So with that, I'd like to express, once again, to iterate Sentro's commitment to fight alongside with you all. And I salute you all for fighting for abolition. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Thank you so much Josua for all the really important work that you are doing at

Sentro. I think these awareness raising activities with this training is really, really interesting and could maybe inspire other unions and I also fully agree with the fact that this is a deeply gendered issue and the need to institutionalised gender equality throughout the organisation is also key to do this battle. And we share also your appreciation word for CATW Asia Pacific which is a really close friend of CAP and I know that there are some representatives also in the audience and I give them a big “Hi”.

## **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

### **Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

I see that we have very few questions actually. I see a very technical question that I can answer for some reasons, maybe some of you have been confused about the timing of the event and join quite lately. So be reassured, the event is recorded and will be replayed on our YouTube channel very soon, so even if you have missed the very powerful speeches that we have had today, you will be able to catch them and see them later on.

And I see only one technical question, and I think this is for Hidayat, you've replied privately but maybe it could be interesting to share this question to everyone: about the activities that you as Union are conducting to pursue your government to ratify the 190 Convention of ILO on gender-based violence. Maybe you would like to share your answer with the audience? Please.

### **Mr. Hidayat GREENFIELDS**

As a global trade union organisation the IUF, first of all, I should say that when Convention 190 was being developed, the very first discussions, the Coalition Against Trafficking Women in Asia Pacific played a very important role in working with us to educate our Unions and affiliates, and to give our input about the violence against women into the whole process before it became a Convention.

So once it became a convention with, unfortunately all the negotiation and compromise that happens, what we've got, where we as a global union fighting for ratification of Convention 190 and adoption of the recommendations, and then we included in all negotiations with transnational companies about their commitments.

And yes, it's very much part of our programme, our education and our campaign and policy programme. We have not made significant progress yet with many countries, but of course, you know, in the next four-year Congress periods is absolutely priority. But it does need much more education on the ground in order to build support. It can't just be a deal done at the top because it will be a very weak convention. So I think we still have to push through with a lot more education organising and create more demand for it. So our focus on the 25th of November every year on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is to get unions to take more action, to create

the demand for this Convention to be ratified from the ground up. Thank you.

### **Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Thank you very much. There is also a question about research studies resources on the topic. It is an opportunity for me to let you know that in a few days, we will be launching our Last Girl First report, which is a very strong and fact-based report highlighting the fact that women and girls from the most vulnerable communities are overrepresented into prostitution. You can find this online on our website very soon and also you can follow us on our social networks and you will find many resources.

I don't know if maybe anyone wants to share resources to help people to keep understanding what prostitution is?

### **Ms Diane MARTIN**

I just put in the chat the website of the campaign that I'm cheering in Scotland, which is and yes, you can see on [www.amodelforscotland.org](http://www.amodelforscotland.org) and as well as information about the campaign, which is basically calling for the introduction of the Nordic model, the Equality model here in Scotland. There are, I think about currently four webinars that we have held since September. The first one was the launch webinar and then there are other specific topics like ones on men who paid for sex, one on pimping websites, and the last one we had, it's going to be two parts. We've held one part, which is "what can we learn globally from countries who have adopted the Nordic model" and we are trying to do an event every four to six weeks. But if you

look on that website, it's very easy to just click on the links of those webinars and I think that is encouraging as the ones that I access from many of the other organisations participating today. Thank you.

### **Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Great, is there anyone who wants to share resources? Yes Flora?

### **Ms Flora WHITFIELD**

Hello. I just want to say thank you everyone. And I would always just refer to the human trafficking hotline if there's a need and get connected with your community agencies. I'm not exactly sure what that all looks like for everyone because we're in so many different places. But just, become aware with those different agencies because they all provide different things and the individuals that you will be working with, as you all know, will have different case management needs. And it's going to take a village of us to come together and work alongside of our survivors. That's what it took for me. So that I know that it works in collaboration and networking. Specifically, I would say that Breaking Free website has a lot of information that you can tap into, and I will put our QR code in the chat box as well.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Ms. Claire GUIRAUD**

Thank you so much. We are now reaching the end of our event.

As a conclusion, I would like just to share a quick wrap up of what has been said. So, I believe that we have heard that prostitution can never be a work, considering the serious violation it is of human dignity, gender equality and human rights more generally. I think we have heard also that prostitution can never be a work in the scope of the international labour law on international human rights. And I think we have heard also that access to decent work is possible for all and for persons exiting prostitution. We recognise and commend the tremendous work that survivors and frontline organisation are doing for that, and the efforts done by the Union to promote those ideas, and also the commitment of Member States – and we really hope that this event and your commitments will inspire other States and other unions in joining our efforts.

On behalf of CAP, I really want to thank you all panellists for your excellent insights. I want to also thank the interpreters, the participants and also all the CAP members and staff who have help me to organise this event, and specifically to our intern Mai Linh Tran who was very very helpful in the past days.

If some of you are interested in knowing more about our campaigns, abolitionist legislation, if you're an NGO, a State, a parliamentarian, a Union, anyone you can reach out to us. We will share our contacts on the chat, and we will be really happy to discuss that. On my side, I am permanently based in Geneva, so if they are neighbour in the audience, I would be really happy to discuss in real.

Also I give you just a short information about our next event in the scope of the CSW that will be next Monday about the impacts of the Russian aggression on the sexual exploitation of Ukrainian women. We will have the participation of two feminist advocates from Ukraine, who will share with us what they are observing, what is going on today, and also two of our members who are in neighbouring countries, one in Latvia and the other one in Lithuania, because they also already observe impacts on their activity today. So we want to offer this space for a conversation to share information about what's going on and maybe identify some concrete needs they have and think on how we can mobilize and call for action.

So thank you very much to everyone. As I have said, this event is recorded. It will be replayed. You will find all the information on our Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and website. Thanks a lot to everyone and goodbye.

**LET'S  
KEEP IN  
TOUCH!**

**Follow-us on:**

- Facebook: @CAPIntl
- Twitter: @CAPIntl
- Instagram: @lastgirlfirst

**Visit our website [www.cap-international.org](http://www.cap-international.org) to:**

- Know more about us
- Subscribe to our newsletter
- Join our campaigns
- Become a sponsor

**Contact us:** [contact@cap-international.org](mailto:contact@cap-international.org)

