

**Submission
No 110**

INQUIRY INTO THE REGULATION OF BROTHELS

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The Committee Manager
Select Committee on the Regulation of Brothels Parliament House,
Macquarie St Sydney
NSW 2000

Re: Inquiry into the Regulation of Brothels in NSW

To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of Empower Foundation. Empower Foundation is a Thai sex worker organization with 30 years of experience promoting rights and opportunities for sex workers. Empower has a longstanding strong relationship with Scarlet Alliance, including working together as part of the Scarlet Alliance Migrant Sex Worker Project.

Sex workers in almost 100 countries around the world, including Thailand have been organizing for full recognition of their human rights at National, Regional and International levels for decades. It is very clear that one of the key steps in order for sex workers to assert their human rights is the decriminalization of sex work.

Criminalizing and/or policing our bodies (legalizing) is not new. It has been tried and has failed in many places, including Australia and Thailand. Buying and selling sex has been illegal for over 60 years in our country but has not led to any reduction in sex work or an "end to prostitution". Our customers have been illegal for 60 years without any improvement in society. The sex industry has grown faster than ever in the last 60 years. More importantly it has not led to better lives for sex workers or for our families. Criminalization has not led to increased human rights or reduced abuses; it has only led to more stigma and more real crimes.

We need to get rid of the real crimes in sex work. The real crime in our work is not the buying and selling of sex, but rather the real crimes include, but are not limited to, the abuse of power by authorities, corruption, extortion, discrimination, violence with impunity, state neglect or our rights as workers, exploitation of our labor, denial of justice, arbitrary arrest detention and deportation, and entrapment.

Keeping our work criminalized means we cannot be treated as human beings but must be treated as criminals by society, including health workers, police and media. Our workplaces are not expected to be safe and healthy but must be treated as "dens of vice and crime" which do not need things like OH&S or even fire exits. Our employers are not expected to be responsible and fair employers but must be treated as "mafia figures" "pimps" and "traffickers" who do not need to worry about labor law, wages, health coverage or hours etc. Our customers are not expected to be respectful but must be treated as "abusers" and "exploiters" who do not need to pay properly or behave appropriately. Changing our status to "victim" is not an improvement. Experience has shown us that both criminal and victims must be kept in a cage; they cannot be free like other humans to make our own decisions and build our own futures.

The experiences and lessons learned from twenty years of decriminalization in NSW provide evidence and hope to sex workers and their supporters around the world.

The NSW Parliament should take pride in being a pioneer in recognizing and supporting human rights of sex workers. Decriminalization of sex work is widely supported by UN agencies such as WHO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA; and human rights organizations such as Amnesty International.

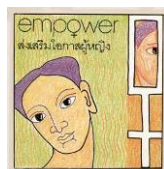
Decriminalization of the sex industry means the real crimes in sex work can be addressed and ensures sex workers are able to better assert our human rights.

We trust the Committee will continue in its tradition of respect for human rights and base its decisions on evidence and sincere consultation with sex workers.

Regards,



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