

Sex Talk

July 2016 – 21st International AIDS Conference

Issue 02



No “Keeping the Promise” without Sex Workers



It has been 16 years since the International Aids Conference was last held in Durban. Much has changed. In 2000 – just 6 years after our first democratic elections and 4 years after we adopted our constitution, sex workers were idealistically waiting for change. In fact it was 1999 when law reform on sex work was first mooted and in 2002 an issue paper was released by the South African Law Reform Commission. Yet, criminalisation of sex work still remains on the agenda 14 years later. The release of the last report resulting from a discussion paper in 2009 has been ‘imminent’ for 3 years now.

Just how serious are we about addressing the needs of sex workers?

There are 4 things you need to know about criminalisation of sex work:

1. It harms sex workers
2. It enables corruption and abuse against sex workers
3. It drives stigma and
4. It erodes our efforts to end AIDS.

Sex Workers are at the conference in numbers, although continued criminalisation meant we had to wait at the doors while our criminal records were checked and we had to argue to be let in. We had to explain why we are here, we had to answer questions for security personnel.

For more news & highlights on the #AIDS2016 conference, follow us:



@SweatTweets



Sex Workers Education & Advocacy Taskforce

This is an excellent example of the literal barrier that criminalisation poses to sex workers! Sex workers are arrested for having consensual sex while their rapists never see the inside of a jail cell.

The law against sex work doesn't work – after 52 years of criminalisation, sex workers are still here. The only thing the law has done is enable police corruption and abuse. It allows violence against sex workers to continue unabated – crimes against sex workers go unreported and those who abuse sex workers can do so with impunity. Sex workers are jeered at in police stations, told they cannot report rape because sex workers can't be raped. Sex workers are profiled by police, arrested under by-laws rather than the sexual offences act. Stigma is a machine oiled by criminalisation –justifying the actions of those who would shut sex workers out and refuse us services. After all, we are criminals. In this space where we would assume support, we are pulled aside and questioned. We have to ‘sensitise’ health care workers to do their jobs because sex work is stigmatised. Just like this conference, we must answer questions before being let in.

Can we say we are serious when our government, through the police, burn condoms provided by another arm of government? Can we say we are serious when condoms are confiscated from sex workers as evidence of criminal activities? When the anti-prostitution pledge still stands? Can we say we are serious about HIV when sex workers are refused access to this conference? Can you say you are serious about the needs of sex workers when your commitment is only on paper, and not in practice? We made so many gains since 2000– we changed the racist and oppressive laws that prevented progress. The law that criminalises sex work is the last remaining apartheid era law. Courageous activists are at this Conference and had to fight to be here. Some didn't make it – we have lost many of our colleagues to untreated illness, to violence.

Make true the promise to leave no one behind – we want a 2016 conference resolution that all countries must decriminalise sex work now.



VISIT DAILY



Sex Workers
Networking
Zone

Booth: 619



SWEAT
Exhibition
Space

Booth: 323



Networking
Zone for
Transgender

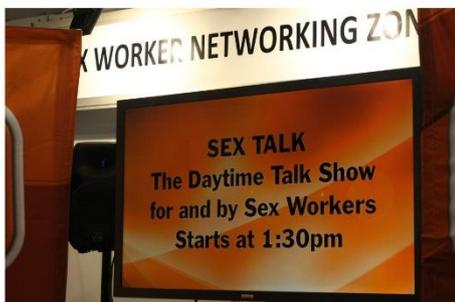
Booth: 613

Picture of the day

Sex Workers: Your Frontline In The Battle Against HIV



Sex Talk Show with Duduzile Dlamini



Red Umbrella Rally to SANAC's Session:

South African National Sex Workers Plan: Are You Coming?



MONDAY, BLOODY MONDAY

I had an early start to my day after a late end to my yesterday. Why does activism need to involve so much activity? And as I finally kick off my shoes to give my sore feet a well-deserved rest it suddenly occurred to me that maybe you would find it interesting to know what it is like spending a day in my shoes and see the world through the spectacles tainted by somebody living with HIV.

I kick-started my day with a healthy dose of demonstration followed by planning my week to make sure I make the most of this amazing opportunity that I am so privileged to enjoy. After that I set off to a presentation by the Elizabeth Taylor Foundation about the work that they have been doing to encourage and facilitate testing and treatment amongst men in the South of Malawi. The presentation included a video presentation to show the work that is being done on the ground which I found very interesting until they showed a group of men being tested and a man undergoing an HIV test. As the camera zoomed in close to show the blood dripped onto the test kit, I was suddenly not in the safe and comfortable auditorium any more.

I was back in a mobile testing booth waiting for the second line to appear. The moment that changed my life. The moment I was told that I was HIV+.

I couldn't stay in the auditorium because I was re-living that moment and needed to get to a safe space. I left the auditorium in search of the Positive Lounge so that I could be in a place that is safe amongst people who are like me and who will understand. As I was walking along nothing looked the same as before any more. The convention centre had become an enormous monument to HIV filled with reminders everywhere that I was one of those damned people who had the plague. All around me I could see people who were engaged in making lots of money out of this dreadful disease that has killed so many innocent people. This wretched disease that is very choosy and specially selects those who are vulnerable, disempowered and poor. Just to make their lives more miserable and add more complications than they could reasonably be expected to manage.

I wanted to hate these people who were like vultures feeding off sick and dying people. But I couldn't. It's not their fault that I am one of the unlucky ones. And if it wasn't for all of them I would probably not be alive any more.

The walk to the Positive Lounge seemed endless with excited delegates determined to block my way as if by design. But eventually I was there and I could just sit and exist without any risk of encountering an unexpected AIDS ribbon. But of course, my complacency was short-lived. Two women came in and appeared to be gawking at us. Then they took out their mobile phones and took photographs of the HIV+ people. I suppose they wanted to go and show their families what HIV+ people look like.

I hope they have satisfied their curiosity. Now they know what we look like.

But their intrusion brought me back down to earth with a bang. Because there is nowhere safe. You always have this shadow darkening your day no matter where you go. It's always there. It always will be.



Let me practice my rights with passion, dignity and freedom

It's the 1st official day of the conference and the air is filled with euphoria, it's also Mandela day in South Africa.

"There is no passion to be found playing small - in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living." -Nelson Mandela

The true meaning of these words were demonstrated by the opening direct action from us sex workers at 7:00a.m, at the entrance of the ICC. We went all out singing struggle songs, acting out stories of the sex workers that were murdered by clients in this criminalised environment and mostly saying I am a sex worker watch me roar by our proud stance at fighting for our rights.

I'm still disappointed though at the fact that the same government officials cannot, in our faces tell us what are the happenings around the South African Law Reform Commission's paper on project 107. Just a reminder, the public at large did the democratic act of submitting recommendations and research as provided by our constitution for legislative reform processes. To that I'll just drop something from my thoughts:

*I was sold a dream
I got a nightmare
I was sold passion
I was given emptiness
I was sold Liberation
I was given incarceration
I was sold unity
But I have been segregated
I was told I am a conqueror
But they treated me as failure
I was told I belong
But I was marginalised
I was told to prepare
But there was no platform
I was sold Equality but
Here I am looking in the eye of privilege and class
They said we will succeed
But they succumbed to mediocracy
So, I'll take the dream, the passion, liberation, unity, become a conqueror, I'll belong, I am prepared, I'll fight for Equality and change, I'll succeed...*

"For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." - Nelson Mandela

REPORT LAUNCH: POLICE ABUSE OF SEX WORKERS

Join the Women's Legal Centre as we release the findings of our research of the violation of human rights of sex workers and abuse by law enforcement.

Where: Booth 619, Sex Worker Networking Zone
Global Village

When: Tuesday 19 July 2016

Time: 16h30 – 18h00



**Give Me a Voice and I Will Do it Myself:
Rethinking the Agenda for Sex Worker's SRHR Advocacy**

Date: Tuesday 19th July 2016 | **Time:** 1330-1530 | **Venue:** Pavilion Hotel, Durban
Moderator: Mashudu Azwianewi Madadzhe, SAFAIDS

Esteemed Speakers:

- Celebrating success in the Sex Work Advocacy, Our Experience - **Ishrar Lakhani (SWEAT)**
- The SA National Sex Worker Plan and Its Implications - **Lebowa Malaka (SANAC)**
- The position of Trans Sex Workers in the Sex Work Advocacy movement - **Gita November (SWEAT)**
- Redefining the Landscape for Sex Worker Led Advocacy focusing on SRHR - **Grace Kamau (KESWA)**
- Lessons from the SAFAIDS SRH Sex Worker Group Action (SWAG) Model - **Percy Ngwumeme (SAFAIDS)**
- Creating safe environment for sex workers in Brits and Rustenburg: How we won the case for safe brothels - **Tracy Phahlane (CPC)**

SAFAIDS welcomes you to this platform that seeks to stimulate dialogue and discourse on strengthening advocacy towards greater access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for sex workers.

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Sex work(ers) related sessions schedule

Tuesday, 19 July 2016

Title	Organisers	Venue	Time
HIV Prevention Literacy – Remembering What We Have Learned	Pathfinder International	Session Room 3	07:00-08:30
Leveraging HIV Funding to Address Criminalization and its Impact on Sex Workers, Transgender Women and Gay Men in Africa		Session Room 8	07:00-08:30
Doing the Right Things in the Right Ways: Policy, Legal and Ethical Challenges in Delivering Comprehensive Treatment and Prevention Services for Key Populations	Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF)	Global Village Room 2	11:00-12:30
Common at Its Core: Understanding the Linkages for Challenging the Impact of Criminal Law across Key Populations	UNAIDS, Amnesty International, Yale	Session Room 3	11:00-12:30
Give Me a Voice and I will Do it Myself: Rethinking the Agenda for Sex Worker's SRHR Advocacy	SAFAIDS	Pavillion Hotel	13:30 - 15:30
Human Rights, Wrongs and Realities: Translating Frameworks into Actions		Session Room 5	13:00-14:00
"Mmangwana o tshwara thipa kabohaleng" - the mother of a child holds the knife on the sharper edge. Improving health outcomes for children of sex workers"		Session Room 5	13:00 - 14:00
The Double-edged Sword of the Media: A tool for African LGBTQ activists and other criminalized communities or a minefield to be avoided?	AVAC: Global Advocacy for HIV Prevention	Global Village Youth Pavilion	14:30 - 16:00
Removing Human Rights Barriers to HIV Prevention, Care and Treatment: Using Data to Drive Action Globally			14:30-16:00
From Shadows to Light: Advocacy for children of Key populations	Coalition of Children Affected by HIV	Child focussed networking Zone	15:00 - 16:00
Courage in Leadership: World Leaders with the Political Will to Remove Punitive Laws		Session Room 6	16:30-18:00
Sex Workers Rights and HIV: Global Village Scavenger Hunt	GV Performance	Main Stage	17:05-18:05