

Sex Talk

July 2016 – 21st International AIDS Conference

Issue 04



What a hectic day...

On the third day of the conference, sex workers were caught by surprise when an anti-sex work group demonstrated and distributed pamphlets with false information about sex workers to AIDS2016 delegates. The news quickly reached sex workers who gathered at the sex worker networking zone, a counter demonstration was quickly organised as sex workers refused to be silenced by an ignorant bunch of bigots. The developments left some hurt, some disappointed, some humoured and some hopeless at the amount of discrimination and judgment passed on by those who think they know what's best for people who do sex work.

As this was going on, some sex workers eagerly awaited the visit to the sex worker networking zone by Elton John, unfortunately the visit was postponed to Thursday, 21 July. However, besides the little setbacks, the day was upbeat and full of energy and unity among global sex workers. And tomorrow we wait to meet Elton John.

JOIN US IN HONORING SIR ELTON JOHN AND THE ELTON JOHN AIDS FOUNDATION
by the presentation of the
Asijiki Award for Courage & Initiative

The Asijiki Coalition for the Decriminalisation of Sex Work will present this inaugural award in appreciation of the courage and tenacity of Sir Elton John and The Elton John AIDS Foundation in fighting for the rights of sex workers.

DATE 21 July 2016 **TIME** to be announced

VENUE to be announced,
International AIDS Conference, ICC Durban

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Doctors for Life protest against the Decriminalization of Sex Work

It is almost impossible to talk about sex work without throwing in the morality aspect of things. This however needs to be addressed with utmost caution. One first needs to define morality and furthermore, explain the grounds of morality. One thing is for certain, there is bound to be conflict as what another person would deem immoral could be another's morality.

Wednesday the 20th of July which marked the 3rd day into the 21st International AIDS Conference, saw a protest orchestrated by Doctors for Life. This was aimed at denouncing the efforts to call for the decriminalization of sex work. Their arguments were based on religious values and unfounded statements which were totally baseless and intellectually bankrupt to have been drafted by "doctors".

First of all, they claim that decriminalizing sex work will promote pimps and traffickers. I have witnessed sex workers who feared to report cases of trafficking and abuse by clients and pimps because they feared second victimization under the criminalized system as they too are labeled as criminals. If one looks at a decriminalized system, sex workers will be free to report such cases without fear.

These so called protestors for "human dignity" accuse Sisonke & SWEAT of promoting and recruiting females to become "prostitutes". Here is a breakdown for those who agree with Doctors for Life: SWEAT is an organisation that works with sex workers in terms of health and human rights and Sisonke the only national sex workers' movement in South Africa, do not recruit women to become "prostitutes". In any case, who said sex workers were only female? What about the male and the transgendered sex workers? Are they being manipulated into "prostitution" too?

Piece of advice to the doctors for life. Please change your name to something else. You can't claim to be entities "for life" when you are in support of a system that has seen many sex workers perish around the globe without justice being served.

VISIT DAILY



Sex Workers
Networking
Zone

Booth: 619



SWEAT
Exhibition
Space

Booth: 323



Networking
Zone for
Transgender

Booth: 613

We do not need any more evidence, the evidence and proof happened this morning...



We do not need any more evidence around human rights abuses, Women's Legal Centre (WLC) does not need to produce any more evidence and reports, Even the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) does not need to hold hearings anymore.

We saw all the evidence we could ever need today. The whole world saw it when a group of mostly men started distributing pamphlets with false information on sex work. The group even went as far as having a demonstration outside the IAC holding placards that would further incite stigma and discrimination towards sex workers.

One pamphlet read: ***"Female? Homeless? No Education? Sexual Abuse Victim? Economically Vulnerable? SISONKE & SWEAT have a job offer for you... Become a PROSTITUTE!!"***



First of all Sisonke or SWEAT does not recruit sex workers, instead they assist sex workers who with health and human rights issues. Here at the conference I have met sex workers who come from all walks of life; some rich, some poor, those who have university education and those who don't, skilled and unskilled ones. So to think that sex workers are just disadvantage women, men & trans-people is untrue.

When we are talking about brutality, abuse, killing, stigma and discrimination from the community. We talking about what happened this morning. I saw a community attacking sex workers, I saw a community disregard sex workers and reducing them to victims.



There is no evidence more than this that sex workers experience continuous violence and judgment. The people who organised the demonstration disregarded the fact that sex workers are taking charge of their health and want to learn more lifesaving medication and how to protect themselves and their client from HIV. But I guess the criminalisation of sex work gives them the legitimacy to do what they did today. All the government cares about is a healthy sex workers.

What is a healthy sex worker when they are not safe?

PEPFAR – Anti-prostitution pledge how it impact sex workers

Yesterday I co-facilitated a panel discussion session organised by Sonke Gender Justice, Open Society Foundation, Change and Women Vision. The session was on “Anti-Prostitution Pledge” and the impact on sex worker health programs: the Who, the What, the How.

Kholi Buthelezi National Coordinator of Sisonke, Sex Workers Movement in South Africa, spoke about how it affects the Sex Workers in South Africa. She spoke about how most sex worker who are employed by organisations that are funded by PEPFAR cannot advocate for decriminalization anymore. And how they're facing challenges of discrimination from other colleagues who are for decriminalisation of sex work.

She gave example and said sex workers feel like their colleagues are betraying them. Because during working hour they distribute condoms and other services, whilst at night when they doing sex work they advocate for decriminalization. “Stigma is still playing big role on sex worker’s life because of PEPFAR funding.”

I also echoed her sentiments ad believe that it also affects many Ngo’s who want to join the ASIJIKI Coalition, so we can speak one voice. Also it stops a lots of sex workers to come forward and advocate for themselves and support each other.

The discussion will continue tomorrow at the global village.



PEPFAR's “Anti-Prostitution Pledge” and the impact on sex worker health programs: *the Who, the What, the How*

Learn about the pledge, its impact on activities and services, and effective advocacy to respect and protect sex workers' rights.

Conference Workshop

Wednesday, 20 July
11:00 – 12:30
Global Village Session Room 2

Global Village

Thursday, 21 July
19:00 – 20:30
Global Village Session Room 1

Facilitated by: **Kholi Buthelezi**, Sisonke | **Anne Cathumbi**, Open Society Foundations
Deon Haywood, Women with a Vision | **Grace Kamau**, Kenya Sex Workers Alliance (KESWA)
Constance Mathe, Asijiki Coalition for Decriminalisation of Sex Work in South Africa
Marlise Richter, Sonke Gender Justice | **Beirne Roose-Snyder**, Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
Jasmine Tyler, Open Society Foundations



Sisonke members show off the zine

Sisonke took the famous “Ask A Sex Worker” booth to museum in Durban which was one of SANAC’s activities as part of the AIDS Conference. At the museum we showcased SWEAT & Sisonke’s ICT materials together with Izwe Lethu newsletters and the currently published zine - a collaboration of written and visual work produced by Sisonke members and African Centre for Migration Society.

The zine was a project where sex workers wrote their own stories of the journey they travelled while doing sex work, and stories of foreign sex workers and their experience in a country where sex work is illegal.

It was a great time for some of the participants who were part of the team that put together the zine to engage with people about the work they produced.

At the start of the project, some participants were shy and could not write or read in English but by the end of the project they produced good work that they are all proud of.

At the museum people who were brave enough to engage with us got to learn more about the processes it took to put together the work. Some were shy to approach because the booth is so in your face and asks them to ask a sex worker, so I do not know if they were shy to talk to sex workers or they just didn’t find us interesting.

At the museum the flow of people was very slow, people came in small numbers and those brave enough to engage with us got to learn more about the processes it took to put together the work. Some though could not stand at the “ask a sex worker” booth for reasons only they know. We even had sex workers stopping at the booth and sharing stories about their countries and their migration.



Sex work(ers) related sessions schedule

Thursday, 21 July 2016

Title	Organisers	Venue	Time
What People Living with HIV Want	HIV Justice Network		07:00-08:30
Young Key Populations: Empowered to Claim Their Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights	UNFPA	Session Room 2	11:00-12:30
Advocacy Tactics II: Communities Challenging Human Rights Violations	International AIDS Conference	Session Room 3	11:00-12:30
Not Your Rescue Project: Films From the sex Worker Rights Movement, Reclaiming Our Stories, Transforming Our Communities, and Addressing HIV/AIDS	Scarlet Alliance	GV Film Screening Room	11:00-12:30
Factors associated with antiretroviral treatment utilization among HIV positive female sex workers in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban	International AIDS Conference		12:30-14:30
Documentaries on Human Rights Violations Among Transgender Sex Workers in China		Global Village Session Room 2	13:00-14:00
Making AIDS History by 2030 High Level Meeting	Africa Union Commission and the Government of South Africa	Session Room 3	18:30-20:30
Sex in the city of Gantueng “The Ucomfortable Truth”	Gauteng AIDS Council	Session Room 11	18:30-20:30