

Sex Talk

July 2016 – 21st International AIDS Conference

Issue 05



The conference has come to an end, I guess the only question I have is what did we achieve?

From sessions on Prep, sessions on human rights, session on health and sexual reproductive rights and politicians visiting our stand at the Sex Worker Networking Zone. We had the princesses of Zulu and Swaziland on the opening of the global village, Charlize Theron (PROUDLY SELFIE'D WITH THE "SEX WORK IS WORK" BADGE), MP Jeff Radebe, Yvonne Chakachaka etc.

The visibility of sex workers unapologetically advocating and protesting for our rights was astonishing and exciting. Finally we raise a voice in unity and together with one message "Decriminalise sex work globally", the evidence is there our choice for our work is visible.

We had politicians and policy makers publically stating decriminalisation is the only option e.g. Judge Edwin Cameron, the most exciting was the Deputy Minister of Social Development publically wearing the "This is what a sex worker looks like" T-Shirt and fully supporting sex workers.

We leave the conference knowing that the world knows sex work for us is work and a clear choice, politicians fully supporting sex work and sex worker's rights, more stakeholders to implement better health and legal services for sex workers world over, having built incredible connections with our fellow brothers and sisters in the sex work movement and with the thought of just maybe, maybe sex work will be decriminalised soon. I can't wait to get back to the office and plan for future partnerships and preparing for the decriminalisation stage of our movement.

Goodbye for now my fellow sex workers, maybe when we meet at the next conference it would be to discuss how we make policies for our brothels in a fully decriminalised environment.

Presentation of the Asijiki Award for Courage & Initiative

The Asijiki Coalition for the Decriminalisation of Sex Work in South Africa presented Sir Elton John and the Elton John AIDS Foundation with the Asijiki Award for Courage & Initiative at the 2016 International AIDS Conference. This award recognizes unwavering and outspoken public advocates for their commitment to sex worker rights.

Asijiki is a broad-based advocacy coalition that brings together sex workers and human rights advocates for agitation on sex worker human rights, and specifically for the decriminalization of sex work. Asijiki is the isiZulu term for 'no turning back'!

The Asijiki Award for Courage & Initiative allows us a moment to step back and recognize our allies, show our appreciation for their bold work towards our common cause, and share with others our appreciation of their efforts.

Today we proudly presented this inaugural award to Sir Elton John and the Elton John AIDS Foundation for their enduring public support of sex workers rights. The award is intended to acknowledge those whose peers often take a less brave stance and are overall under-recognized for their advocacy, specifically on issues of sex work. We were particularly inspired by Elton John and the Elton John AIDS Foundation's steadfast and public support of Amnesty International's position on the decriminalisation of sex work, for funding sex worker projects internationally, as well as speaking out against the indifference and hate that fuels the AIDS epidemic.

We are proud to present this award today, and we will continue to move forward fearlessly and vigorously towards our vision of a world where sex worker rights are safeguarded and all sex workers are treated with dignity and respect.

We salute our allies and supporters, and urge them to capitalize on the momentum the AIDS conference has catalysed on the urgent need for the decriminalization of sex work!



VISIT DAILY



Sex Workers
Networking
Zone

Booth: 619



SWEAT
Exhibition
Space

Booth: 323



Networking
Zone for
Transgender

Booth: 613

Steamiest session to date of the AIDS2016 International Conference

The Gauteng Department of Health had the steamiest session to date from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm. Although it was a late session many people attended and they stayed and it was not for the free flowing wine but the realities of the conversations about sex. The title of this session was Sex in the City: "The Uncomfortable Truth"

The realities are that sex is a fact of life and it is not about immorality. We need to normalise sex and we can only do this talking openly about sex. Talking about the different ways that people have sex.

There were a number of speakers who shared their experiences of having sex. These ranged from a disabled man, a transgender sex worker, an MSM, a bisexual woman and a couple who own a swinging club. In addition the MEC for Health for Gauteng also spoke about what is happening and how the Department is responding to the multiple ways in which people have sex.

In the opening address facts and figures were shared and all in all Gauteng has a high number of people living with HIV and an equally high number of people who are on treatment. 90% of all pregnant women who access public health care in the province are on ART and this has lowered the rates of vertical transmission to less than 2%.

Disabled people are normally ignored when we talk about sex. The realities are that people with disability also have sexual feelings and being disabled does not mean the inability to have sex. The disability sector is a sector that as a sex work sector we need to engage as there are sex workers living with disabilities as well as conversations around clients who are living with disabilities. The presenter mentioned the need for people to talk about sex openly and seek assistance. The couple who own the swinging club mentioned that research has shown that couples who swing have lower rates of HIV than couples who don't swing. The reason for this is that they are more aware about what they are doing. When one goes to a swinging club, one already knows that the chances of having sex are high and they come prepared.

Although sex happens everywhere and can happen anywhere, the reality is that one needs to think about issues of safety. Sometimes people have sex spontaneously and this happens everywhere, but for women who have sex with women, violence is a reality and lesbian women. Unlike heterosexual people, having sex in a club is regarded as someone being risky or promiscuous but with lesbian women being seen by the wrong person could lead to violence and so people need to be careful when and where sex happens.

Sex work is work and sex workers sometimes face hard choices about being risky in terms of the sexual acts in order to make money. Being a transgender sex worker, for the speaker was very liberating. She didn't want to have a sex change operation as her penis is part of her sexual gratification. Both her clients and her partner LOVE it. She loves her breasts and the combination of the breasts and the penis make people excited and want to come for more.

In the closing the MEC spoke about the different campaigns that were meant to be conversation starters on sex that the Department had embarked on. This including messaging for the different populations. She also mentioned that the conversation on the decriminalisation of sex work is happening and that some people are in support. The positive nature in which she spoke about decriminalisation showed that there is some hope in the horizon, and that as partners based in Gauteng we need to approach the office of the MEC to see what provincial legislation is harmful for sex workers that can be addressed to ensure that the rights of sex workers are not violated

Asijiki and the AIDS Conference – a circus but still going strong!

It is Thursday afternoon, and we are tired. Connie and Marlise sit down at the cool Sex Work Networking Zone to scramble together some thoughts and impressions of the AIDS conference so far. It is hard, but Constance is on a roll. She has had an unending stream of energy, and have been at the Networking Zone from early to late to explain to passers-by what sex work is, why decriminalization is important and why they needed to join the broad-based Coalition of Asijiki.

Marlise asks Connie what her highlights of the conference have been so far. Without missing a beat, Connie says “Judge Edwin Cameron’s plenary session. Because the sex workers were brought into the middle of the conference and he spoke out strongly against the criminalization of sex work”.



Judge Cameron was presenting the Jonathan Mann Memorial lecture and invited key populations onto the stage at the end of his lecture. Constance got a prize picture with Judge Cameron and former Constitutional Court judge Zach Yacoob.

Extracts from Judge Cameron’s plenary are as follows:

Sex workers are perhaps the most reviled group in human history – indispensable to a portion of mostly heterosexual males in any society, but despised, marginalised, persecuted, beaten up and imprisoned.

Sex workers work. Their work is work with dignity.

Why do people do sex work? Well, ask a sex worker –

To buy groceries, and pay their rent, to study, to send their children to school, and to send money to their parents and extended family.

It is hard work. Perilous work. Sex workers have a tough, dangerous job. They deserve our love and respect and support – not our contempt and condemnation.

They deserve police protection, not exploitation and assault and humiliation.

More importantly, they deserve access to every bit of HIV knowledge and power that can protect them from infection and can help them to protect others from infection.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) works for sex workers. It should be made available to them, as a matter of urgent

Criminalising sex workers is a profound evil and a distraction from the important work of building a humane society.

Other highlights for Constance include meeting with Minister of Justice, Jeff Radebe, and discussing with him the challenges that sex workers face. After describing the ‘condoms of evidence’ practices by the police, and other humiliating routines like forcing sex workers to eat used condoms, Minister Radebe invited Constance to meet with him at his offices to discuss further. Asijiki will definitely capitalize on this rare opportunity.



Constance also had the honour to present Sir Elton John with the Asijiki Award of Courage & Initiative at the Hilton hotel. The handing over of the award was planned months prior to the conference and the team that organised it was sceptical as to whether Sir Elton John will receive the award himself or send a representative from the foundation, but he came in person and received the award and even said he was humbled to receive the award.



Cops & Rubbers at the AIDS2016

Abongile Gungubele Sisonke Eastern Cape Provincial Coordinator, facilitated an interactive advocacy game called: Cops and Rubbers at the Sex Worker Networking Zone.

The game which was design by Lien Tran from the University of Miami and support by Open Society Foundations Sexual Health and Rights Project, was first introduced to me in April 2016 when Lien came to SWEAT to provide training workshops on the game so we can play it as part of our creative advocacy work.

I then saw it as an opportunity for me to facilitate the game at the AIDS2016, as we would be meeting with sex workers and non-sex worker people who will be attending the conference.

This game is based on the Open Society Foundations 2012 report Criminalizing Condoms: How policing practices put sex workers and HIV services at risk. The report draws from research Conducted in Six Countries: Kenya, Namibia, Russia, South Africa, the United States and Zimbabwe.

In Countries around the world police use condoms as evidence that one is a sex worker. Even here in South Africa, we see a lot of cases such as those potrayed in the game.

Treating condoms as contraband forces sex workers to choose between safeguarding their health and avoiding police harassment or arrest. Cops and Rubbers is an interactive demonstration of these policing practices that highlights the consequences for sex workers, including increased vulnerability to HIV infection.

The participants of the game at the networking zone were very impressed by the message and lessons taught by the game. They felt that the game teaches you how you to set a goal at the beginning and you have principles to follow in order to reach the goal. Some of the participants who played the game came from; South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Australia etc.



Sex workers poster presentations

Yesterday as I walked through poster presentations, what struck me was the number of poster presentations on sex work but what was even more striking was the number of posters by sex workers. It was easy to spot the posters by sex workers and people who understood the lived realities of sex workers to the more academic posters. Posters by sex workers were easy to understand but also all had recommendations about what will be in the best interest for sex workers. The most common recommendations were around the importance for looking at sex workers holistically and the importance of the decriminalisation of sex work for sex workers to address some of the challenges faced by sex workers.

It is important that as we start thinking about IAC 2018 in the Netherlands, we think about how do we increase posters and presentations by sex workers, how can more sex workers be supported to also do research in their own communities and start setting the research agenda? How do we ensure that sex workers in their numbers attend and hope that recommendations will not only be about decriminalisation of sex work as we would have achieved that but the realities of doing sex work under a decriminalised model.

sweat



Satellite: Making Sex Work- Innovations and Good Practice for improved health outcomes for sex workers

**Where: Venue Room 10, ICC
When: 7am - 8.30am on the 22nd July 2016**



Continue the conversation at our exhibition stand, or find us @ the Sex Worker Networking Zone!