

Joint statement from Women's Aid UK on Amnesty International decision to back decriminalisation of prostitution

17 August 2015

Women's Aid federations in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland oppose the decision taken by Amnesty International to support the full decriminalisation of prostitution. We believe this policy effectively legitimises abuse perpetrated by pimps, traffickers and exploiters, and sends a message to men and boys that they are entitled to access and abuse women's bodies.

Women's Aid federations and member organisations support hundreds of thousands of women and children every year who have experienced domestic abuse, sexual violence and human trafficking. We see first-hand the devastating effect that the sex industry has on women, on girls, and on society as a whole and we know that women who sell sex experience high levels of domestic violence and sexual violence.

Women's Aid regards prostitution as a form of violence against women and girls, grounded in inequality and exploitation. Women's entry into, and experiences within, prostitution are inextricably linked to gendered poverty, discrimination, and the multiple disadvantages women face in society. The persistence of these economic and social inequalities mean that so-called 'free' or 'consensual' choices in prostitution are actually decisions made in conditions of already existing inequality and discrimination. Women's Aid supports the decriminalisation of those who sell sex, and advocates that they should have access to safety, protection, healthcare and support, and routes to exit prostitution should they choose to do so.

However, we oppose the decriminalisation of buyers of sex and third parties who profit from the sale of sex. Women's Aid believes that Amnesty's stance will support an exploitative industry which abuses and subjugates some of the most vulnerable and marginalised women and men across the globe. The policy also flies in the face of the international human rights obligation to tackle the demand which fuels human trafficking.

Women's Aid calls on governments to reject Amnesty International's policy on prostitution, and instead implement legislation, policy and practice which protects and supports women in prostitution without endorsing the exploitative industry within which they operate. We support the Nordic Model in place in Sweden, Norway, Canada and Northern Ireland.

Notes for Editor

Women's Aid in the UK consists of four federations: Women's Aid Federation England, Scottish Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid and Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland.

Women's Aid is the lead agency supporting women and their children who experience domestic violence in the UK. Women's Aid provides refuge accommodation, outreach support and a wide range of support services to victims of domestic violence.

More information about Women's Aid across the UK can be found at:

Women's Aid Federation England: <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/>

Scottish Women's Aid: <http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk/>

Welsh Women's Aid: <http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/>

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland: <http://www.womensaidni.org/>