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Open Letter to Amnesty International:

Does Amnesty International campaign for human rights – or men's rights?

Amnesty International claims to be a human rights organization. Lately, however, Amnesty seems to exclude women from those who count as humans. Instead, Amnesty endorses guidelines that restrict women's human rights.

Amnesty International is currently discussing its policy on prostitution. The proposed new policy is a document* which is entirely based on old myths. The very same myths that the pro-prostitution lobby in many countries no longer succeed in implementing, as they have been contradicted by both research and experience during the last 10-20 years.

The document contains a number of the pro-prostitution lobby's usual arguments:

- They put buyers on par with sellers, as if there was no power structure between men and women in prostitution, as in society at large.
- They criticize laws against prostitution without distinguishing laws that criminalize only the buyer/perpetrator, only the prostituted, or both at the same time.
- They make a sharp distinction between what they call "sex work" and trafficking, and claim that Amnesty International is obviously against trafficking – thus ignoring that all prostitution share the same basis, as well as the broad research now showing how trafficking is increasing in countries where prostitution is legalized as "sex work".
- They claim that it is not prostitution, but society's negative attitude towards "sex work" that creates health risks in prostitution, despite the fact that health risks – including violence – is an integral part of prostitution as such.
- They reveal their derogatory view on people with disabilities, and make the experiences of women with disabilities invisible, by claiming that people with disabilities need "sex workers" because they otherwise cannot "get" sex.
- They compare views on prostitution with views on homosexuality, as if the daily and global sexual exploitation of mostly women and girls had anything to do with the sexual orientation of the exploited.
- They refer to consent; "sex work" being good because it's a matter of consenting adults, ignoring among other things the fact that the majority of everyone entering prostitution have earlier experience of sexual abuse, as children or adolescents. The most common age to enter prostitution is 14 years – so this "consent" is basically about adult men and sexually abused children/teenagers.
- They accuse the majority of people in Sweden to be moralists, by claiming that laws against prostitution are based on puritanism and prejudice. (The Swedish Sex Purchase Act is supported by a large majority of the population.)

The reality of prostitution directly opposes these claims. The vast majority of all prostitution consists of men buying women and girls for their sexual use. It is, in fact, prostitution

that comes from an old, puritanical sexual tradition, where the wife, as well as "the whore", was supposed to be at the disposal of the heterosexual male. Prostitution is based on the sexuality of the buyer. The prerequisite of all prostitution is the expectation that the one being prostituted does *not* want to "have sex", and is instead bought – that's why the "sex trade" exists.

Aside from this incomprehensible attitude towards prostitution, it turns out that Amnesty International has bowed down to the most patriarchal countries in the world when it comes to abortion. Thus, since 2007, Amnesty International supports women's right to abortion only after rape or incest or if the woman's life is in danger. Amnesty International has adopted this abortion policy despite having access to both new and old research proving that the amount of abortions do not decrease by prohibition – it only makes more women die in illegal abortions instead. According to the Chair of the Swedish Amnesty, Sofia Haldt, the reason behind this policy is that the organization has to "compromise" – failing to mention that this "compromising" is being made in a time when women's right to abortion is threatened in several countries time and time again.

Consequently Amnesty International is supporting limitations of the human rights of half the population – women. Without changing this course of development soon, Amnesty International can no longer be considered a human rights organization – because then it's no longer campaigning for the human rights of *all* people. Who benefits from this?

If Amnesty International wants to keep its credibility as a human rights organization, it must immediately stop compromising women's rights.

Sweden in February, 2014

Kvinnofronten

(Women's front in Sweden)

P.S.

We encourage Amnesty International to read Kvinnofronten's collection of argument "Speaking of Prostitution" before adopting any new prostitution policy:

www.kvinnofronten.nu/eng/speaking-of-prostitution.htm

* "Decriminalization of Sex Work: Policy Background Document"