



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Fifty-seventh session**

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled  
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace  
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic  
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and  
further actions and initiatives**

### **Statement submitted by Sveriges Kvinnolobby, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## Statement

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1979, declares that States must take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women (art. 6). Even so, and despite the increasing understanding and agreement that trafficking and prostitution seriously violate women's human rights, the purchase of human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation is still not prohibited in all countries.

Prostitution and trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation are severe forms of violence by men against women and international crimes of increasing global magnitude. Any society that claims to defend principles of gender equality and women's human rights must oppose the notion that the bodies of women and girls are commodities that can be bought and sold. The prevalence of prostitution is an obstacle to equality between women and men. Furthermore, it is our strong conviction that when adopting the perspective of equality and human rights it is not possible, nor relevant, to make a distinction between voluntary and non-voluntary prostitution.

In order to prevent and combat the purchase of sexual services and trafficking, Governments need to address the demand. The most effective way of doing so is by criminalizing the purchaser, and not the seller, of sexual services. Such a shift addresses the root cause of the exploitation, which is the demand, and not the person being exploited.

On 1 January 1999, Sweden became the first country to introduce legislation criminalizing the purchase, but not the sale, of sexual services. The legislation stated that it was unacceptable that men, in a gender-equal society, should obtain casual sexual relations with women in return for payment. By introducing a ban, Sweden also sent an important signal to other countries, highlighting our view on purchasing sexual services and prostitution. The law points out that prostitution causes serious harm to individuals as well as to society. It was the first to define prostitution as a form of male violence against women. Since then, Swedish legislation is regularly referred to as a model to be followed in ending prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation.

An evaluation of the law clearly demonstrated its positive effects. Since it was introduced, street prostitution in Sweden has been halved. When it was introduced, its critics argued that that it would drive prostitution underground and that it would increase the risk of physical abuse of women in prostitution, but the evaluation found no proof that that had been the case. There is also evidence that the extent of prostitution on the Internet is much lower in Sweden than in other countries.

The evaluation also stated that the law had reduced the extent of trafficking. Evidence shows that the ban on the purchase of sexual services has counteracted the establishment of organized crime. According to the national criminal police, it is clear that the law acts as a barrier to human traffickers and procurers who are considering establishing themselves in Sweden.

Furthermore, women who have left prostitution refer to the law as helpful in giving them the strength to leave and to stop stigmatizing and blaming themselves and instead put the blame on the male purchasers. Thus, the law has been a concrete

tool, both in decreasing the demand by purchasers and in helping women to leave prostitution.

Above all, the evaluation showed that the demand for sexual services had been reduced and that the law had had a normative effect on society. The ban on the purchase of sexual services was intended as a statement of society's view that it should not be possible to buy a human being. The evaluation showed that that had been the case. Sweden has seen increased public support for the ban, with support greatest among young people.

The legislation having been in place in Sweden for 13 years, it is time to take the next step forward and further strengthen it. In order to do so, Sveriges Kvinnolobby wants to focus on how Governments, private actors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can collaborate in the fight against sex purchase and sex tourism.

When Swedes travel abroad, whether for business or pleasure, sex purchase is illegal only if it is criminalized in the country visited. The legislation needs to be consistent and clear that sex purchase and trafficking is not allowed, either in Sweden or abroad. It is time for Sweden and other countries to follow the example set by Norway, where the relevant legislation entered into force on 1 January 2009, and expand the law to include sex purchase abroad. Policies should be formed on the basis of human rights and equality between women and men regardless of the place of the crime. Such legislation better allows for addressing the growing problem of sex tourism.

Sveriges Kvinnolobby wants to see that the implementation of the current legislation is prioritized and kept on the political agenda with resources and education of police officers, judges and social workers. Furthermore, it is important to involve the private sector, including companies and travel agencies, to take action against the sex trade by introducing policies and codes of conduct against sex purchase for employees.

In order to make certain that violations of women's human rights are ended, the trade in women's bodies needs to be prohibited all over the world. Sveriges Kvinnolobby and its member organizations urge States and the United Nations to prevent, combat and eliminate prostitution and trafficking in women and girls by:

(a) Taking a clear and explicit standpoint, through the implementation of existing legislation and conventions, that prostitution and the sexual exploitation of women are violations of human rights. States must conclude international agreements to address the problem of trafficking in women for prostitution and live up to the commitments already made, including those contained in, for example, the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women;

(b) Prioritizing prevention of prostitution and sex trafficking by criminalizing the purchase of sex. States must adopt or strengthen legislative and other measures to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of sexual exploitation of women and girls. States must also put in place information campaigns to spread information on sex purchase as a violation of human rights;

(c) Preventing trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation by combating the demand. In order to do so, efforts must be directed towards young men and boys

by working on aspects of masculinity, gender perspectives, norm critique and gender equality at an early age, e.g. through educational systems and sports associations;

(d) Collaborating with private actors and NGOs in the fight against sex purchase and sex tourism. For legislation to be consistent and clear, it is important to encourage the private sector to take action, for example, by introducing policies and codes of conduct against sex purchase and by including women's rights as part of corporate social responsibility;

(e) Ensuring continued and sustained social work to support girls and women at risk of ending up in prostitution and to support girls and women to leave prostitution. States and NGOs need to work together to provide support services and measures for the safe return of women who have been victims of trafficking. Although focus on the purchaser is critical for preventing prostitution and sex trafficking, it is also important for professional groups to offer help and support to girls and women in prostitution.

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