



Asijiki Press Release

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The Asijiki Decrim Coalition commemorates the 15th International Sex Worker Rights Day

International Sex Worker Rights Day started in 2001 when 25 000 sex workers gathered in India for a festival organized by a Calcutta-based group called *Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee* (Unstoppable Women's Synthesis Committee). In 2002, *Durbar* invited organizations from around the world to join them in commemorating Sex Worker Rights Day on 3 March annually. This year sees the 15th International Sex Worker Rights Day.

Recognising sex worker rights and safety are now more important than ever.

Three sex workers were shot in the Eastern Cape in February, allegedly by a client. Two tragically passed away, and the third is in a critical condition. Also in February, a female sex worker was found strangled and stabbed to death in Nelspruit. She was last seen leaving with a client. In a country with exceptionally high levels of violence and gender based violence, sex workers are particularly at risk of rape, abuse and murder. This is largely due to the on-going criminalisation of sex work, which makes sex workers easy targets of abuse. All aspects of sex work are criminalised in South Africa, and drive sex workers away from social serves, health care



and police protection. Sex workers are providers for extended families and children, but are made into criminals and victims by outdated criminal laws.

On this day, we recognise the progress that the health sector has made in recognising the importance of decriminalising sex work. We look forward to the official launch of the “The South African National Sex Worker HIV Plan, 2016 – 2019” on 11 March 2016 by the Deputy-President and the Minister of Health. This Plan is clear that sex work needs to be decriminalised to safeguard sex worker rights and public health & safety.

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On this day we call for:

1. The immediate release of the South African Law Reform Commission report on ‘Adult Prostitution’ (Project 107). It has been more than 15 years and government has not made any recommendations on how the laws on sex work should be reformed.
2. Swift justice for sex worker victims of abuse and murder. For example, the case of Nokuphila Kumalo who was murdered in Woodstock on 14 April 2013 continues indefinitely. The case against her alleged murderer, Zwelethu Mthethwa, has been postponed more than 11 times.
3. An immediate stop to police harassment and abuse of sex workers.
4. Increased access to sex worker-friendly and non-discriminatory health care, including non-judgemental health care workers.



We salute the courage and tenacity of sex workers and sex worker advocates in South Africa, Africa and globally for standing up for their rights, challenging abusive practices, and persisting in their calls for the decriminalisation of their work. This often comes at a great cost to themselves.

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