



20 October 2022

Press Release

PRESS RELEASE

Sex worker murders in inner-city Johannesburg: The Department of Justice should expedite the decriminalization of sex work to reduce GBV

On 9 October the police found the bodies of six women in Central Johannesburg. They were brutally murdered and their remains were discarded in dustbins around a panel beating shop. The alleged murderer is a well-known sex work client in the area, and it is believed that a number of the victims were sex workers who had been reported missing since late June.

In the context of the extraordinary high levels of gender based violence in South Africa with daily reports of murders, rapes and abuse, these murders have received perhaps disproportionate public attention. The media provides regular real time updates about the case and the incident has been a popular topic on radio, TV and print media. Many members of the public has used the opportunity to express their horror at the way sex workers are treated and have called for the urgent reform of the law that criminalises sex work.

While the Asijiki Coalition welcomes the overwhelming public outcry against the violence and how outdated laws make sex workers vulnerable, it deeply regrets the circumstances that have led to the focus on sex work.

Asijiki mourns the deaths of the six women with their friends, family and broader sex worker community. Says, Constance Mathe the Coordinator of the Coalition: “I wish we could state that these brutal murders of sex workers in Johannesburg’s inner city are unusual. It is not. The sex worker community mourns the deaths of colleagues on a too regular basis. The criminal law has to fall!”

The Asijiki Coalition demands:

- 1.) The prioritisation of this case within the criminal justice system;
- 2.) That the Department of Justice provides a timeline for when it will finalise [its decriminalisation of sex work Bill](#) and when it will present it to Parliament; and
- 3.) The urgent passing of the *Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill* into law that provides specifically for hate crimes against sex workers.

We call on members of the public to write to the President, the Minister of Justice and Deputy-Minister of Justice to call for swift action on these demands.

For press enquiries: Constance Mathe

Email: coordinator@asijiki.org.za

Cell: 0780042241