

## NCPE Press Statement

### **A human rights approach to the prostitution reform entails the penalisation of sex-buying**

In view of the upcoming finalisation of the report by the Prostitution Reform Technical Committee, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) states that the prostitution reform should adopt a human rights approach, entailing both the decriminalisation of prostitution as well as the penalisation of sex-buying.

Since its inception after World War II, the United Nations had adopted various international instruments related to human rights that make it amply clear that prostitution is "*incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person*"<sup>1</sup> and that States should "*suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women*"<sup>2</sup>.

Prostitution is a form of exploitation rife with physical and psychological violence. It is also, primarily, an exercise in power and control of men over women, since the absolute majority of prostitutes are women, while the absolute majority of pimps and clients are men. While prostitutes should not be punished for suffering exploitation, sex-buyers should be penalised. This disrupts the exploitative sex market and sends a strong message in favour of gender equality.

Countries that normalised prostitution and legitimised sex-buying saw the widening of the sex market through an increase in both the demand as well as the need for supply, becoming a magnet for human trafficking for sexual exploitation and a hub of sex tourism. Conversely, countries such as Sweden that criminalised the purchase of sexual services reported a shrinking sex industry and a reduction in human trafficking. Less demand less supply.

The NCPE also underlines that the discussion surrounding the prostitution reform should bring into focus the behaviour of clients, mostly men, and the existing patriarchal structures of inequality that lead many men to objectify women and buy their bodies. The prostitution reform should thus embrace efforts to promote gender equality in society and fight gender stereotypes, as well as devise a strategy for a crackdown on pimps and traffickers.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, of 2 December 1949

<sup>2</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



As the national equality body, the NCPE reiterates that the prostitution reform should be centred around the principles of human rights and equality.

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