



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S POOR DECISION. BY TRISHA BAPTIE

Human rights. What are they? How do we access them? More importantly, what impedes one's ability to live the full life that these rights are meant to afford us?

Basic human rights are things like access to water, food, clothes, housing, education, and to live free from violence and torture. These, along with 23 other rights, are listed at un.org/en/documents/udhr.

What happens when someone is denied any of these rights?

Amnesty International (AI) has long been held up as a champion of human rights. AI has been around for 54 years, with locations around the world.

AI has worked on a diverse range of issues and, as of August 11, 2015, may have made its biggest policy mistake to date. AI released a policy that recommends the decriminalization of all aspects of prostitution, including pimps, brothel owners, and buyers of sex.

AI does not endorse the Nordic model, which we know works. Evidence shows that the Nordic model, which criminalizes the demand for paid sex while decriminalizing those being prostituted, decreases violence and trafficking. Survivors of prostitution, myself included, know that this model is the best step forward in dealing with prostitution.

"Sex workers are one of the most marginalized groups in the world who in most instances face constant risk of discrimination, violence and abuse" (Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International).

What Mr. Shetty has said is true.

Prostituted women and girls are marginalized. They do face violence and abuse. Who is doing this violence? Who is committing this abuse? These practices do not happen in a vacuum. *Someone* perpetrates these atrocious acts and, overwhelmingly, men are the ones responsible.

It is this behavior that we must be challenging, not normalizing. Falsely, AI claims that criminalization of any part of the sex industry is a violation of human rights. According to this line of thinking, using power and finances to pay for sex from women is a man's



human right. According to this line of thinking, men (pimps and brothel owners are also disproportionately men) who sell women have a right to sell them, as if sex can be broken down to nothing more than a commodity, as if it can be totally separated from the body being sold.

Note: I did not say human right, because we know, globally, that the face of the persons who buy sex are male, and the face of those being sold are female and, more specifically, poor, brown, young, and female.

Prostitution is the manifestation of the denial of human rights and the granting of invisible, nonexistent human rights to men.

These so-called rights usually sound something like, “Men need sex. It’s a biological imperative!” or, “My wife won’t do what I like!”, etc.; these so-called rights cannot be extrapolated when individuals talk about a genuine human right.

Even the terms “sex worker” and “sex industry” erase the true picture of prostitution: men buy sex for their own sexual gratification, usually from a woman or girl who has less power, less money, and unstable housing or immigration status.

These are just some of the daily disadvantages that drive women and girls into prostitution.

I am astonished that someone could make a statement such as the one made by Mr. Shetty and then propose that in order to protect the people being marginalized and abused, to help them, to possibly work towards ending this gendered abuse and discrimination, those perpetrating this abuse should be decriminalized and legitimated.

Decriminalizing women should be obvious. Women should not face criminal sanctions for the situations that resulted in their being prostituted.

Women should not be faced with criminal records or negative involvement with the police because they are being sexually exploited. Likewise, prostitution should not be seen as a solution to gender-based inequality. Prostitution should not be considered a solution to poverty, to lack of food, or to any other lack of an *actual* human right.

A woman or girl should not be required to provide a sexual act in order to access such rights.



The Nordic model is not just a matter of criminalization. When implemented, first by Sweden in 1999, it was a three-pronged approach to dealing with prostitution.

One prong was criminalizing the demand for paid sex. The other two prongs were public education and direct help and prevention for women and girls.

Since criminalizing the purchase of sex in 1999, the number of men who buy sex in Sweden has significantly dropped, whereas in countries where prostitution is legalized or decriminalized, we see more men buying sex.

Simon Häggström of the Swedish police notes that in Germany alone, where prostitution is legal, *1.2 million men* buy sex every year.

Melissa Farley, cited by the U.S. State Department, reports that:

- 89 % of those who are prostituted worldwide want to escape
- 65% of prostituted persons were sexually abused as children
- 60% are raped
- 40% of people trafficked for sex are under 18 (Polaris Group)

Even though prostitution is legal in Nevada, over 80% of the prostitutes interviewed by Ms. Farley said they wanted out. Five years after prostitution was legalized in Germany, the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* said that the Family Ministry found “no solid proof to date” that the legalization had reduced crime and abuse. They also found that legalization had “not brought about any measurable actual improvement in the social coverage of prostitutes.”

Why, then, would AI like to keep this form of abuse going? Why would they not want to reach right to the roots of this injustice and rip them out?

If we want to talk human rights, we have to talk about who is being denied them and who is benefiting from that denial.

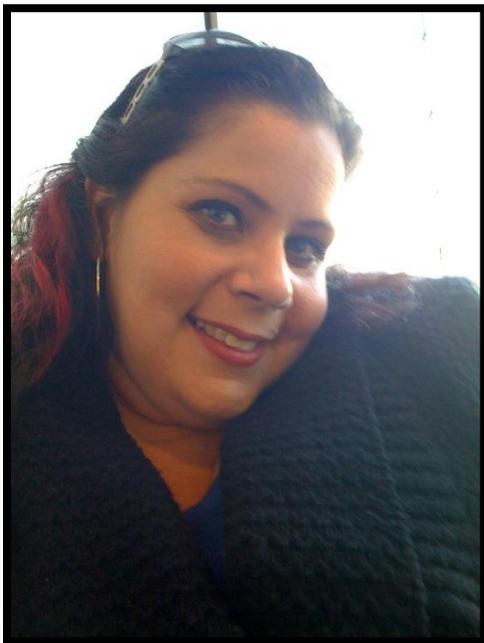
In this case, men benefit, and women and girls are abandoned to a system that rebrands abuse and neglect as a job.

For more, please see the following links:



- Feminist Current Article: feministcurrent.com/2015/08/17/how-to-manufacture-consent-in-the-sex-trade-debate
- The World Post Article: huffingtonpost.com/taina-bienaime/the-framing-of-gender-apa_b_8273268.html
- Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) Statement: catwinternational.org/Content/Images/Article/630/attachment.pdf
- CATW Petition: change.org/p/amnesty-international-vote-no-todecriminalizing-pimps-brothel-owners-and-buyers-of-sex/u/13732840

PLEASE WRITE AND SEND THE DEFEND DIGNITY POSTCARD TO THE CANADIAN HEADQUARTERS OF AMNESTY.



Trisha believes that one sexually exploited woman is one too many, and this exploitation ultimately has dire consequences for entire communities. She founded Honour Consulting & EVE (formerly Exploited Voices now Educating) to give women with experience in the sex industry a voice regarding legal and social policy reforms. Trisha works with a diverse cross section of non- profit, community, academic, government, grassroots and faith groups presenting to a vast array of audiences on the local, national, and international stage.