



Urban Justice Center
123 William St., 16th floor, New York, NY
10038



PRESS STATEMENT

For Immediate Release:
Tuesday, May 1, 2007

Contact: Melissa Hope, NSWP, melissa@nomadcode.com
Juhu Thukral, SWP, 646/602.5690 jthukral@urbanjustice.org

ADVOCATES CRITICIZE MORALISTIC POLICY THAT RANDALL TOBIAS ENFORCED

(New York City, May 1, 2007) – Randall Tobias retired from his position as Director of U. S. Foreign Assistance and Administrator for the U. S. Agency for international Development (USAID) after being implicated in a prostitution scandal. The irony is that Tobias was the chief enforcer and mouthpiece of the Anti-Prostitution Pledge, which requires USAID grantees, among others, to denounce prostitutes—the very people whom they are trying to empower and serve. As advocates for the health and human rights of sex workers, we are not interested in Randall Tobias’ personal life. However, the recent revelations about his connections to an escort agency that operated in Washington DC provide an opportunity to reflect on the ineffective and morality-driven policies that he enforced.

The proponents of the Anti-Prostitution Pledge claim that it will help in the fight against HIV/AIDS. However, sex workers are not the source of the HIV problem—instead, they are a key part of the solution. When they are empowered and their rights are protected, sex workers are able to insist on condom use and take on the role of sexual health educators and prevention advocates. It is difficult, if not impossible, for sex workers to mobilize when they are being demonized. The real human impact of the Anti-Prostitution Pledge is that people around the world are being denied the healthcare, rights, and services that they deserve:

- Brazil rejected approximately \$40 million in USAID money because signing the Pledge would interfere with its successful anti-HIV/AIDS program;
- A class that taught English to sex workers in Cambodia had to seek other funding as a result of this policy;
- In Bangladesh, 16 drop-in centers lost funding when the agency that supported them signed the Pledge—the sex workers affected by this describe it as having lost their home, their family, and their sense of community and safety; and
- Organizations in India that work to empower and organize sex workers in India have been falsely accused of trafficking the very women that they are helping.

Organizations are so fearful of the political backlash stemming from the Anti-Prostitution Pledge that many are going further than the Pledge may even require, because they do not understand what kinds of programs are banned. For examples, some groups have dismissed sex workers, claiming that they can no longer keep them on staff, and other groups have distanced themselves from sex workers’ groups with whom they had previously worked and supported.

The real hypocrisy here is that people who need healthcare and services, and who need their rights to be protected, are being denounced by those whose stated mission is to help them.

The Network of Sex Work Projects has produced a 13-minute video about the effects of the pledge. Watch “Taking the Pledge” at <http://www.sexworkerspresent.blip.tv/file/181155>.

The Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center provides legal services, legal training, documentation, and policy advocacy for sex workers in New York City. For more information, please visit our website at <http://www.sexworkersproject.org>

###