



Urban Justice Center

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PRESS RELEASE

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Murders in Atlantic City Highlight Violence Against Sex Workers **Urban Justice Center's Sex Workers Project Encouraged by Swift Police Response**

(New York City, November 30, 2006) – The Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center is deeply saddened by the recent news of the murders of four women in Atlantic City. The revelation that three of the four identified women, Kim Raffo, Tracy Ann Roberts, and Barbara Breidor, had past prostitution arrests, as well as discussion among those who engage in sex work in the area that the fourth woman, Molly Jean Dilts, may also be a sex worker, is indicative of a larger pattern of violence against people working in the sex industry. Numerous studies indicate that people who work on the streets experience disproportionately high levels of physical and sexual violence. In fact, reports from cities throughout the United States have found that close to 80% of people involved in street-based sexual exchange have been victims of work-related violence.

The authorities are investigating the theory that the perpetrator may be a serial killer. While they have not yet concluded that this is the case, serial killers have long targeted women working on the street. In fact, sex workers in almost every major American city have experienced attacks by serial killers. Most recently and publicly, Gary Ridgway, known as the “Green River Killer” of Seattle, preyed on women in the sex industry and was ultimately convicted of killing at least 48 women during a 21-year period. He maintained that he thought he could kill as many prostitutes as he wanted without getting caught. Indeed, it was not until 2003, 21 years after he began killing, that he was brought to justice, despite the police having questioned him as a witness to the murders in 1983.

In May of this year, in Atlantic City, just blocks from where the bodies of the four women were found, two other female sex workers were violently murdered and a third was assaulted. Those cases are still unsolved. This violence against persons in the sex industry is unconscionable, yet it persists because our society has often turned a blind eye to individuals who are marginalized and stigmatized by criminal laws and social discourse.

The Sex Workers Project is encouraged by the work of the New Jersey state and local police, the F.B.I., and the County Prosecutor, as well as other officials who are pursuing this case. The swift establishment of a Task Force to investigate these horrific murders is commendable. It has been deeply troubling that violence against sex workers in the past has not been met with rigorous concern and is often viewed as a “hazard of the trade,” but it appears that authorities are working hard to find the killer(s) and to end the campaign of fear against vulnerable women in Atlantic City.

To commemorate the lives of workers who have been subject to violence, the Sex Workers Outreach Project-USA (SWOP-USA) began the annual Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers in 2003. The day is marked by vigils worldwide. A New York City vigil will be held this year on Sunday, December 17, at a time and place to be determined. Please visit the Spread Magazine and SWOP-USA websites for more information on the upcoming event.

Spread Magazine: <http://www.spreadmagazine.org>

SWOP-USA: <http://www.swop-usa.org>.

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>

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