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## **At International AIDS Conference in D.C., A Call To Change U.S. Policy On Sex Work and HIV**

*U.S. To Host Global Conference For First Time In Over 20 years; Due to Immigration Bans, Sex Workers Largely Barred From Attending*

*The Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center To Present on How Laws and Policies Around HIV/AIDS Affect Sex Workers*

**New York, NY** – At the 2012 International AIDS Conference in Washington, D.C. on July 22-27, the [Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center](#) will join with global activists in calling for a change to U.S. policies regarding sex work and HIV, many of which have a negative impact on the health and safety of sex workers around the world. The Sex Workers Project will hold multiple events throughout the conference:

- *A Call to Action: Global Sex Workers Recommend Policy Change for Better HIV Prevention and Treatment*
- *How The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)'s Funding Restrictions Affect Sex Workers*
- *Condoms as Contraband: How Harmful Police Practices are Hurting Sex Workers, and How to Fight Back*

Due to U.S. Immigration Law, sex workers are largely excluded from entering the U.S. to participate in the conference. In response, sex workers have organized the **Sex Worker Freedom Festival**, an alternative International AIDS Conference 2012 event for sex workers and allies, which will take place from July 21-26 in Kolkata, India. Sex workers in Kolkata will be live-streamed to participate in several of the Sex Workers Project's events.

### **Event 1: Symposium/Satellite Event**

*A Call to Action: Global Sex Workers Recommend Policy Change for Better HIV Prevention and Treatment.*

July 22, 9 am – 11 am, Session Room 3.

In 2011, sex workers participated in a global review of HIV policy through the UN sponsored Global Commission on HIV and the Law. Regional dialogues took place around the world, and sex workers' rights groups advocated for reform of polices to

improve HIV prevention and treatment for sex workers. In sex workers' statements from around the world, similar concerns were echoed, including funding restrictions that impede prevention for sex workers; the criminalization of sex work and the dangerous public health situations it creates, such as reduced use of condoms and increased violence; the use of other discriminatory laws to repress and punish sex workers; the exclusion of migrant sex workers; and the increased targeting of clients of sex workers. On July 9, the Global Commission on HIV and the Law released their final report, which endorsed many recommendations that came out of these conversations.

This Symposium will include panelists from the international sex workers rights movement, presenting policy reform recommendations to improve HIV prevention and treatment for sex workers. Speakers include:

- Deon Haywood, Women With a Vision, US
- Melissa Ditmore, Sex Workers Project, US
- Pye Jacobson, Sweden
- Kholi Buthelezi, Sisonke, South Africa
- Sian Maseko, Sexual Rights Centre, Zimbabwe
- Elena Eva Reynaga, RedTraSex, Argentina
- Miriam Edwards, NSWP, Guyana
- Mariann Bodzsar from SWAN, Hungary – speaking from Kolkata India
- Sheena Manikiwai from Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers, Fiji – speaking from Kolkata India

### **Event 2: Press Conference**

*How PEPFAR's Funding Restrictions Affect Sex Workers.*

July 23, 3-4pm, Press Conference Room 1

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program has met with great success, but this funding is conditional upon organizations having a stance against prostitution. Sex workers have reported mixed effects from full support from PEPFAR for sex work projects to being isolated by organizations that receive PEPFAR funds. For this reason, SWP has consulted with sex workers and projects in Southern Africa about their experiences. The "dark ripple effect" described by sex workers during this consultation is the topic of an oral poster presentation by SWP consultant Melissa Ditmore on Wednesday, July 25 at noon. Additionally, a press conference featuring others about the ways PEPFAR has affected sex workers will be held that day, with speakers from the US and abroad.

Speakers include:

- Melissa Ditmore, Research Consultant, Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center
- Serra Sippel, President, Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)

### **Event 3: Global Village Workshop**

*Condoms as Contraband: How Harmful Police Practices are Hurting Sex Workers, and How to Fight Back*

Monday, July 23, 2:30-4:00, Human Rights Networking Zone – Global Village

In April, the Sex Workers Project and the PROS Network (Providers and Resources Offering Services to Sex Workers) released a new report, “*Public Health Crisis: The Impact of Using Condoms as Evidence of Prostitution in New York City.*” It reveals findings from two separate surveys of NYC sex workers, including a survey conducted in 2010 by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOMH). Both studies found that police routinely confiscate condoms from sex workers; that sex workers often do not carry condoms for fear of police repercussions; and that some sex workers engage in sex work without condoms following police confiscation. The report, which can be read [HERE](#), maintains that police confiscation of condoms has serious public health consequences for sex workers and members of their communities.

Speakers include:

- Megan McLemore, Human Rights Watch
- Acacia Shields, Open Society Foundations
- Sienna Baskin, Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center
- Bamby Salcedo, Los Angeles
- Sian Maseko, Sexual Rights Centre, Zimbabwe
- Stacey Leigh, South Africa

### **ABOUT THE SEX WORKERS PROJECT:**

The Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center provides client-centered legal and social services to individuals who engage in sex work, regardless of whether they do so by choice, circumstance, or coercion. One of the first programs in the nation to assist survivors of human trafficking, the Sex Workers Project has pioneered an approach to service grounded in human rights, harm reduction and in the real life experiences of our clients. Our professional service providers are multi-lingual, non-judgmental and bring more than ten years of experience.

As the only US organization meeting the needs of both sex workers and trafficking victims, the Sex Workers Project serves a marginalized community that few others reach. We engage in [policy](#) and [media advocacy](#), community education and [human rights documentation](#), working to create a world that is safe for sex workers and where human trafficking does not exist.

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