



Sex Workers and Allies Call for Change in U.S. Policy on Sex Work and HIV

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Contact:

Darby Hickey darbyhickey@gmail.com 202-250-4869

Audacia Ray audaciaray@redumbrellaproject.org 917-334-8618

WASHINGTON, DC: On the first day of the International AIDS Conference in Washington, DC sex workers and their allies issued a call for change in U.S. policy on sex work and HIV. The panel included Dr. Aziza Ahmed, Assistant Professor of Law, Northeastern University; Dr. Kate Shannon, Director of Gender and Sexual Health Initiative of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia; Darby Hickey, Policy Analyst for Best Practices Policy Project in Washington, DC; and Kyomya MacKlean, Executive Director of WONETHA, an organization that fights for sex workers' human rights in Uganda.

More than two hundred organizations and individuals have signed on to a declaration demanding the U.S. repeal and eliminate restrictions on domestic and global AIDS funds, which currently prevent sex workers around the world from receiving life saving HIV services and medicines. The statement, drafted by a coalition of sex workers and allies based in the United States, also calls for the U.S. to repeal the prostitution inadmissibility ground for immigration; that sex workers not be subjected to arrests, court proceedings, detention, mandatory testing or government-mandated "rehabilitation" programs; and that the U.S. reorient anti-trafficking campaigns to be in line with the standards set by the United Nations.

"Our declaration came about because our issues are being mishandled by policy makers who do not meaningfully consult sex workers while making decisions that impact our lives," says Darby Hickey. "Without the input, knowledge, and resources of those most directly affected by the disease, there is no chance of stopping the AIDS epidemic."

"Recent work has shown the extremely high burden of HIV among sex workers and demonstrates major gaps in prevention, treatment and care," says Dr. Kate Shannon. "Our commentary in *Lancet Infectious Diseases*, co-authored by Dr. Montaner and myself, calls for renewed evidence-based approaches, including removal of criminal sanctions and eliminating violence against sex workers, as necessary preconditions to an effective HIV response in sex work worldwide."

Read the full declaration and a list of endorsers at <http://sexworkandhiv.org/>

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