

SUBJECT : INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST SEX WORKERS

We are writing today on the occasion of the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. You are certainly aware that people who sell or trade sexual services currently suffer many forms of violence in Canada and elsewhere in the world.

On this day, we wish to remind you that sex workers have a voice that should be heard and that we, as a society, must allow them to define their own experiences and identities. The labels imposed on them such as "victim" or "undesirable" are a stigma and a form of violence. Instead of attempting to save sex workers, we should give them rights !

Indeed, sex workers do not have the same rights as workers in other economic sectors. Giving them rights is an urgent matter and will help achieve self-determination and fight against exploitation. Canadian laws participate in this ongoing violence as they result in the isolation of sex workers and pose major obstacles to the access to the justice system.

Furthermore, the stigma around sex workers leads to discrimination, namely in child custody, access to housing, employment, or health and social services. Sex workers, especially racialized and trans workers, suffer systemic violence and, among other things, more police brutality, which comes in the form of physical violence as well as verbal abuse.

This year, and partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, laws criminalizing many activities linked to sex work put people who sell sexual services in a highly precarious situation. As organizations providing psychosocial services for sex workers in Montreal, we can testify that many could not have access to financial support programs such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) because declaring their income would pose risks. Confinement periods are therefore particularly hard for sex workers, leading to more risk-taking behaviour in order to work.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT (QUEBEC)

We would like to draw your attention to the intersectionality of the oppressions many sex workers experience in Quebec.

Systemic racism

Although we know that racialized sex workers experience violence on a daily basis and that Indigenous sex workers are too often murdered or reported missing, it is with regret that we witness Quebec's ongoing refusal to acknowledge systemic racism. This acknowledgment would be a first step towards the elimination of the injustice and the violence racialized and Indigenous people have been fighting against for a long time now. We therefore invite you to acknowledge the existence of systemic racism in Quebec as well as the serious consequences it has for a large part of the population. We also call on you to make eliminating systemic racism a priority.

Minors

We have noticed that the work done by the special Commission on the sexual exploitation of minors is working towards increased criminalization recommendations. We ask that you take the real needs of underage people trading sexual services for money into consideration. The legal dispositions concerning age and circumstance allowing an underage person to consent to sexual acts can be applied without creating laws that are specific to sexual exploitation. As community organisations working directly with youth trading sexual services, we can see that these laws have a negative impact on the youth : they distance them from the services they need in situations of violence, isolate them, stigmatize & marginalize them. We ask that you rather make sure the material and psychological needs of the youth are met, through access to housing and food, as well as access to social services, which involves adequate funding from institutional and community resources.

On this International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, we invite you to take action and listen to the voices of sex workers and end the perpetuation of violence against them.

SIGNATORY ORGANIZATIONS



Action Santé Travesti(e)s et Transsexuel(le)s du Québec (ASTT(e)Q) - CACTUS



Passages



RÉZO (santé et mieux-être des hommes gais et bisexuels)



Les 3 sex*



Club Sexu



BRAS Outaouais



AQPSUD



Projet d'Intervention auprès des MineurEs ProstituÉEs (PIaMP)



Jeunesse Lambda



Table des organismes communautaires montréalais de lutte contre le sida (TOMS)



Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-SIDA)



Id-est



PACT de rue



Project 10



Travailleuses et Travailleurs Progressistes de l'Éducation (TTPÉ)



Association Étudiante Modulaire en Sexologie



En Marge 12-17



TransEstrie



AlterHéros



Action Jeunesse de l'Ouest-de-l'île (AJOI)



AIDS Community Care Montreal (ACCM)



Action LGBTQ avec les ImmigrantEs et RéfugiéEs - AGIR



Groupe d'action trans de l'Université de Montréal