

STATEMENT FROM INTERNATIONAL SEX WORKER HARM REDUCTION CAUCUS

Prepared for the International Harm Reduction Association's 19th International Conference
Harm Reduction 2008
Barcelona, Spain, May 11 to 15, 2008

The International Sex Worker Harm Reduction Caucus is a working group of sex workers and sex worker rights advocates who are committed to increasing the participation of sex workers and their organizations in discussions of harm reduction at the international level. We are pleased to present the following key messages about sex workers rights and harm reduction issues to delegates and participants in Barcelona:

* **Human rights for sex workers:** Recognizing and ensuring the protection of sex workers' human rights is essential to promoting health and safety. Ensuring that sex workers have full enjoyment of their human rights is the best way to reduce or eliminate the discrimination and abuse to which sex workers are often subjected and to improve access to health and social services.

* **Sex workers are part of the solution:** Sex worker leadership and empowerment are essential in fighting HIV and discrimination. Sex workers are their own best resource—they should be at the forefront of developing and implementing the programs and policies that impact their lives. It is only by empowering sex workers to speak for themselves and developing sex worker leadership that stigma and rights violations will be stopped.

* **Support self-representation of sex work experiences and culture:** A rich tradition of cultural representation (books, films, online presentations, festivals, dance) exists in sex worker communities and organizations all over the world. This year in Barcelona we inaugurate our first sex work and harm reduction film festival to celebrate sex worker self-representation on this topic. Cultural expression makes the aims of our rights based movement more accessible to people who may not be familiar with the realities of sex workers' experience and is an essential part of our struggle for rights and change.

* **Sex work is work, not "harm":** Sex work (itself) is not inherently harmful. The reasons people engage in sex work vary widely, as do the reasons people chose a variety of other jobs. Many sex worker health and rights organizations use a harm reduction framework when they address the needs of sex workers. Other sex worker organizations have a less comfortable relationship with harm reduction because "harm" is sometimes erroneously defined as sex work or sex workers (themselves). We are resolute that any harm associated with sex work results from repressive environments in which sex work is not recognized as work, and because sex workers lack basic human rights and access to appropriate health services.

* **Labour rights for sex workers:** Sex work should be recognized as work in order to ensure safe and appropriate working conditions. The lack of labour rights leaves sex workers vulnerable to abuse and poor working conditions. Sex work should not be "over-regulated" or subject to special restrictions because of discriminatory fears about sex work and sex workers. Sex work should be treated like other forms of labour.

In addition, following consultation during *Harm Reduction 2008: IHRA's 19th International Conference* we would like to affirm that sex workers are key players in promoting human rights and harm reduction, and are pleased to do so in conjunction with allies who share our philosophies and commitment to justice.

"Nothing about us, without us."