

October 19, 2007

Dear Colleagues,

After 8 extraordinary years of working in international public health at OSI, some family issues call for me to be closer to home. I am gearing up for new work with less rigorous travel demands and will be stepping down as Director of SHARP. What a gift it has been to learn from all of you. I have respect and admiration for the activists from the LGBT, sex worker, harm reduction, HIV/AIDS and human rights communities who have so deeply touched my life.

The backbone of SHARP, Rachel Thomas, will ensure continuity during this transition. Francoise Girard, Director of the Public Health Program, is available for any concerns. My last day will be November 9, 2007.

Thanks for the chance to collaborate around improving the health and protecting the rights of LGBT persons, men who have sex with men and sex workers by increasing access to equitable health and social care services and promoting laws, policies and practices that bring an end to discrimination and abuse. I am especially grateful to my Public Health colleagues, the SHARP Advisory Group and OSI's Global Health Advisory Committee for their brave leadership. I hope the day will come when we live in a world without HIV/AIDS and human rights violations.

With appreciation and affection,
Sue

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SHARP ACTIVITIES AND MEETINGS UPDATES

1) *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health and Rights Meeting in Nairobi*
At the end of September, SHARP, Open Society Initiative for East Africa and Ford Foundation supported a conference in Nairobi entitled, "Changing Spaces, Changing Faces: Speaking Out for Sexual Minorities in East Africa." The conference was hosted by The Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and The Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK). The four-day event gave LGBT groups from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi their first opportunity to come together to discuss strategies for human rights protection, HIV prevention, and the desire to build strong LGBT organizations in the region. The activists were joined by

regional human rights organizations; Southern African resource people; and more than 15 international donors who all agreed to join forces in hopes of securing LGBT health and rights in East Africa.

2) *First Sex Worker Advocacy Training in Thailand*

In September, an advocacy training was held for 25 female, male and transgender sex workers from 7 sex worker health and rights organizations from across Thailand. The purpose was to build the capacity of sex workers to address the human rights abuses and discrimination they experience through legal and advocacy remedies. In addition to working with SHARP consultant, Susana Fried, participants collaborated with Thai legal and policy experts to learn concrete strategies to bring about change. Through a competition, funding will be made available through SHARP and the Law and Health Initiative (LAHI) to support participating organizations to undertake legal and advocacy projects. Projects are likely to include strategic litigation efforts, documentation of human rights abuses by police, advocacy around health care access problems and attempts to build alliances with human rights and legal service organizations. SHARP is planning its next trainings in East Africa (January 2008) and Southern Africa (March 2008).

3) *Funders Network Meeting*

At the recent meeting of the Funders Network on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Population held in San Antonio, SHARP organized a panel on the sexual health and rights needs of marginalized communities. The panel, entitled “Listening for Unheard Voices – Making Common Cause with Marginalized Communities,” featured three experts who shared both their professional and personal experiences to increase access to reproductive justice and human rights for migrant farm workers, sex workers, LGBT communities and people with disabilities. Sue Simon, Project Director of SHARP, chaired the panel which explored how the panelists’ identities influenced their work and activism.

4) *New York Times Letter to the Editor Regarding Sex Work Ban*

In response to an article regarding policy trends around sex work and trafficking in Europe, the New York Times published Sue’s letter:

To the Editor:

Re “Bulgaria, Joining a European Trend, Won’t Legalize Prostitution” (news article, Oct. 6):

Recent moves in Europe to ban sex work stem from flawed policies promoted by the Bush administration, conservative groups and some feminists who conflate sex work and trafficking. Playing fast and loose with these terms is the latest trend in the moral and political agenda to abolish all sex work.

Many women and men living in poverty choose sex work because it provides the highest pay. Others sell sex to support their families, augment their incomes as nurses or teachers, or put themselves through school.

Uniformly, sex workers abhor trafficking and have developed effective strategies to help trafficked and under-age persons escape danger and get the assistance they need.

Laws like those in Sweden that punish customers of sex workers are a precarious outgrowth of the abolitionist approach and have not been proved to reduce trafficking or curb demand for sex.

Pushing sex work further into the shadows exposes these workers to enhanced risks, including police extortion and violence. To call every person engaging in sex work a victim is misleading and condescending. The health and rights of sex workers must be protected — especially from those who wield their morality like a sword.

Sue Simon

Director, Sexual Health and Rights Project, Open Society Institute
New York, Oct. 9, 2007

REPORTS AND RESOURCES

1) *Global Working Group Response to 2007 UNAIDS Guidance Note on HIV and Sex Work*
In September, a group of sex worker health and rights activists came together in India to respond to community concerns about the June 2007 UNAIDS Guidance Note on HIV and Sex Work. The guidance was viewed by many in the sex worker health and rights community to represent a shift away from a rights-based approach to HIV and sex work. The “Global Working Group” presented UN representatives with revised guidance that attempts to ensure that HIV prevention resources targeting the needs of sex workers are formulated appropriately, and are responsive to the needs of the community.

A draft of this document has been published and can be found at:

www.sexworkpolicy.wordpress.com, along with a video of the launch and a blog for comments and questions.

2) *DMSC Report on Experiences of Oppression Among Sex Workers*

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (or ‘Durbar’, which in Bengali means un-stoppable or indomitable) is a forum of 65,000 sex workers based in West Bengal, India. Durbar addresses the structural barriers which cause material deprivation or social exclusion for sex workers. In their survey entitled “A Survey of Social, Physical and Occupational Oppressions Heaped Upon our Sex Workers Before and After Entry Into Sex Work,” Durbar measured where sex workers experience the greatest social, physical and occupational oppression. Their findings suggest these women feel more oppressed in domestic settings (as unpaid workers in the domestic sector as daughters, wives, mothers and sisters) in comparison to sex work, which they found more liberating.

The complete report can be found at:

http://www.soros.org/initiatives/health/focus/sharp/articles_publications/publications/dmsc_20070101

3) *Sex and Gender Data Collection in HIV/AIDS Research*

Three Washington DC Community Advisory Boards (CABS) for HIV/AIDS Research have written a joint letter addressing sex and gender data collection in HIV/AIDS research. Most researchers agree that 'sex' refers to birth sex or biological sex; and that 'gender' refers to someone's gender identity. There continues, however, to be significant discrepancies across networks in how data on sex and gender is collected.

The letter asks for the NIH NIAID Division of AIDS to collect data on sex and gender in a consistent and appropriate manner, an issue that is particularly important for the transgender community. Attached to the letter is a fact sheet on the lack of HIV/AIDS research in the transgender community. The letter and fact sheet can be found at:

<http://www.fighthivindc.org/docs/cave/openletter2007.pdf>

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

1) *amfAR MSM Initiative Funding Opportunity*

The Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) has issued requests for proposals (RFPs) to support front-line organizations and networks in the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, and Africa that are working to address the HIV epidemic among men who have sex with men (MSM). Individual organizations are eligible for awards of up to U.S. \$20,000; networks are eligible for awards of up to \$50,000. The deadlines for submitting proposals are October 25 for organizations in the Caribbean; November 15 for Southeast Asia; and December 4 for Africa.

The MSM Initiative collaborates with the Global Forum on MSM and HIV, UNAIDS, and many other partners. The objectives include supporting front-line organizations and networks working to address HIV among MSM; supporting research to build understanding of HIV epidemics and interventions among MSM; and supporting effective policies and increased public funding for HIV prevention and treatment efforts among MSM.

The RFP, application form, application instructions, and additional information about the MSM Initiative can be found at www.amfar.org/msm/awards

UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

1) *International Dialogue on Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS: Strengthening human rights responses in Africa and around the globe, December 6-10, 2007*

A number of domestic, regional and international organizations are supporting this convening from December 6th – 10th, 2007 in Johannesburg, South Africa. ARC International is hosting this year's Dialogue in South Africa to acknowledge the constitutional and legal victories that have been achieved in this country, and encourage the government to embrace these ideals within their own borders, and act in a leadership capacity within the region to advance human rights for all people.

Applications to attend are due on OCTOBER 24, 2007. If you are interested in participating, contact ARC to request an application at applications@arc-international.net

2) *SHARP to Host Information Communications Technology Meeting in Malaysia,*
December 8-10, 2007

In April 2007, SHARP hosted a meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia for 30 representatives of sex worker networks and organizations from around the world. The goal of the meeting was to develop sex worker-led global advocacy campaigns addressing human rights abuses committed in the name of assisting sex workers. A major component of the meeting was discussing how to use information and communications technology (ICT) to further advocacy goals. With support from OSI's Information Program, Tactical Technology Collective (TTC), an NGO which specializes in using technology in advocacy, undertook a survey of sex worker health and rights groups and provided training to advocates during the meeting. TTC recommended that a strategy be developed for a global linkage system for sex worker networks to improve communication, information sharing and collaboration. As a follow up, SHARP is organizing a December 8-10, 2007 meeting in Malaysia for sex worker rights advocates to decide the best model for linking regional sex worker networks and determine how to effectively operationalize these plans.

CONFERENCE DEADLINES

1) *International Harm Reduction Association 2008 Conference*

All abstracts for the 2008 IHRA conference must be submitted through the online system by **November 14, 2007**. More information regarding abstract submission can be found at <http://www.ihra.net/Barcelona/AbstractSubmission>

2) *XVII International AIDS Conference Deadlines*

The following is a list of all deadlines for the IAC in Mexico City:

01 November 2007

- Online registration opens
- Abstracts submissions open
- Satellites and Affiliated Events applications open
- Exhibitions applications open
- Accommodation booking opens

05 December 2007

- Skills building workshop proposals open
- Global Village applications open
- Cultural Programme applications open
- Youth Programme application open

13 December 2007

- International scholarship applications open
- Media scholarship applications open

19 February 2008

- Standard registration fee ends (late surcharge begins)
- Skills building workshops close
- Global Village applications close
- Cultural Programme applications close
- Abstracts submissions close

26 February 2008

- International scholarship applications close
- Media scholarship applications close

31 March 2008

- Satellites and Affiliated Events applications close
- Exhibitions applications close

7 May 2008

- Late surcharge ends (last minute surcharge begins)

20 May 2008

- Late Breaker Abstract submissions open

16 June 2008

- Late Breaker Abstract submissions close

More information about the conference can be found at <http://www.aids2008.org/>

You may join SHARP's listserv at:

<http://www.soros.org/initiatives/health/focus/sharp/newsletter>