

APNE AAP WOMEN WORLDWIDE—ORGANIZING COMMUNITIES TO END SEX  
TRAFFICKING



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 4

April 2011

RELEASING SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, DELHI,  
KOLKATA, AND FORBESGUNJ (BIHAR)

## Stories from First Ever International Survivor's Conference, April 2-5

### **BUYERS OF PROSTITUTED SEX CREATE THE DEMAND FOR TRAFFICKING**

*By Fatima*

**India:** I am thankful to speak in front of everyone today. I was married at age 9 into a family running brothels. When I was 12, I tried to oppose them and ran away three times, but I was returned and beaten.

I stayed and decided to try to fight and form a group with the other girls. I organised the girls to run away and helped five girls return to their homes. One woman was older and had children, so she couldn't run away. I told her to fight for her children.

My mother-in-law, the brothel manager, sent me home to my parents, and when I came back, I found that the woman's daughter was put into prostitution. The little girl showed me the man who raped her, so I picked up a cooking stick and started beating the john, even though I was alone and there was a team of traffickers nearby. My in-laws started beating me up for hitting the customer, but I decided to fight back. I went on a hunger strike, and I would throw away my husband's food and prevent him from eating.

I would go secretly to the meetings at the Apne Aap centre in Forbesganj. Now I am organizing other women and girls.

With Apne Aap, I went to the district magistrate to get a girls' hostel. We succeeded in getting the girls' hostel and formed a women's group.

The immediate needs of the people have to be addressed. Buyers of prostituted sex are the problem. As long as they buy, the pimps will supply women and try to make a profit. If there is no profit, the system will break down. If the men begin to respect us, change will happen.

### **WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE PHILIPPINES**

Keynote: Empowerment of Sex Trafficking  
Survivors - Aims, Challenges and Breakthroughs

*By Alma Bulawan*

**Philippines:** There is a link between big business and discrimination against women. Gender equality and human rights must come hand in hand. There are loopholes in the law that need to be examined and amended. We need more support from the government. We have to use technologies to make the world safer for our women.

But there are breakthroughs and successes. Buklod assisted victims in accessing and completing their education. A small survivor group has managed to win against all odds, and the police have become more sensitive in their treatment of the victims.

## I STARTED LIVING IN MY OWN IDENTITY

*By Shikha*

**India:** I am now 22 and live in West Bengal. In Class 9, I fell in love with a boy. Out of fear of my father, I didn't tell my parents and secretly got married and left home for Mumbai. After two days, my husband took me to a crowded area, which I later realised was a notorious place. The next day, my husband left and never came back. I learned from a woman that I had been sold by my husband and that I should go with her.

I refused and was beaten. I was brought to Kamathipura against my will and had to entertain 10-12 customers a day. I was locked up for three years and started to drink alcohol to cope with the situation.

Then I was rescued and spent 6 month in the rescue foundation home. I then went to Sanlaap home, which started the third phase of my life. I participated in individual and group counselling and started living in my own identity. Now I am a life skills trainer. I have heard about the legalisation of prostitution, but there is so much violence it cannot be legalised.

## WE ARE VICTIMS, NOT CRIMINALS

*By Rogelie Mondejar*

**Philippines:** Like many women, I am a victim of police violation. I was asked for sex in the police station and was hurt physically and threatened that I would be killed. When women are arrested, they have to pay money, and in many cases, they have to have sex with the police or go to jail. My friend was arrested and imprisoned, and when she was released, her child was gone. That's what happens when the woman doesn't want to have sex with the police.

We rescue women so that they don't experience the same thing. We go to the police to talk to the arresting officer, and after long negotiations, we are sometimes able to convince them to release the women. However, the rescue operations are not always successful. Sometimes the police file cases of theft or robbery against the women after they are released.

We give the rescued women strength and help them to make the decision to file cases. We also conduct counseling with the survivors. Together with Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, we lobby in the congress and study the law in preparation for negotiating with the police. We will push for laws that truly protect women.

We are victims and not criminals. Customers, buyers, and pimps should be criminalised, not the women. We strongly oppose the legalization of prostitution because it would mean the legalization of exploitation for us. When you remove livelihood from women and children, they become vulnerable and will go into prostitution.

### **PROSTITUTION IS NOT LIKE HAIR DRESSING**

*By Sheila Jeffreys*

**Oceania:** I am not able to say something inspirational about the situation in Australia since prostitution is legalised there. There are no exit programs in Australia and no recognition of the harms involved. Gradually the state government is realizing that prostitution is not like hair dressing, and it is becoming concerned about organised crime.

The survivors' movement is crucial to ending all violence against women. We are making history and creating historical change here through this conference.

### **OUR BODIES ARE NOT FOR SALE**

*By Agnete Strom*

Half the world is to join hands with each other and inspire each other. A woman's body is not for sale. Pornography and prostitution are the backbone of the sex industry. It is always good to pick an enemy and work with the sex tourism as targets.

### **WE ARE AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

*By Ruchira Gupta*

**India:** There has to be a clause in the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act to punish buyers and clients. Under the Anti Trafficking Act, put in place by British, brothels were given a license, as long as the prostitutes were disease free.

Opposition comes from NGOs and foundations working on AIDS that hire pimps and brothel managers as "peer educators" for condom distribution. They protect male buyers from disease rather than women and girls. Pharmaceutical companies continue to fund programs that foundations dropped.

We are against sexual exploitation; we are not against sex. We have to start influencing the labour organisations, to accept the fact that sex is not work.

### **AN AWARENESS OF THEIR RIGHTS**

*Alma Bulawan, President of Buklod, Philippines*

"Giving women an awareness of their rights enables them to leave prostitution."

### **WE STARTED MOBILIZING THE GIRLS**

*By Fatima*

**India:** Thanks to Ruchira for making me a leader and letting me speak today. I am here to talk about the Nutt community, which was declared criminal by the British and later denotified as a tribe. They never owned property and never had time for peace because they were faced with forced evictions and natural catastrophes like storms.

Due to their constant resettlement and lack of job opportunities, the Nutts were forced to sell their daughters into prostitution under the British. The men in the community decided to start grooming their daughters as prostitutes. From the age 6 or 7, the girl was asked to bring tea, cold drinks and alcohol to customers and was on constant display. Girls and women were kept in constant fear. They were not allowed to talk to each other and were socially brainwashed.

There are cattle fairs, which last for a month, where all daughters between ages 9 and 13 are put into prostitution. There is a contractor who organises all the women. If a household is not able to give a woman, the family has to sell everything and give money to the contractor. People come from neighboring villages, and it is very crowded.

In the midst of this situation, our initiative started. When we started mobilizing the girls, they resisted going to school because they didn't have much hope of becoming successful. But now those girls go to the girls' hostel and attend meetings. They have formed a women's group of 14 members.

The strategy of the group was to take on the contractor at the fair and make the families strong enough so that they don't have to pay the contractor. The women grew more confident and started speaking out, even to the chief minister of Bihar.

### WE REGISTERED TO VOTE

*By Sita Devi*

**India:** I have formed a small group in Kolkata, which concentrates on multiple activities. The group monitors brothels to help women who want to leave and works to prevent brothel owners from relocating the girls from one district to another in order to resell them. The group also makes sure that the women's children go to school and assists the women in getting legal protection as a group.

The women in Kolkata wanted voter cards but were denied them because they live in red light area. However, we went as a group to the government again and again until the women got voter cards. Many marginalised people in India can't vote because they don't have government documentation.

### PEOPLE ARE DESPERATE FOR A MEANS OF LIVING

*By Agnete Strom*

**Norway:** The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific (CATW-AP) is a strategic partner of the Norwegian women's movement because it has the same ideals. In Norway, it took 25 years of fighting before the law was put in place, and it took 60 years in order to establish the 1949 UN convention. My own organization has been working since 1986 to criminalise the buyers of sex, and it took 5 years to fight for abortion.

Our situation is not the same, but we can still learn from each other. We continuously have to seek new allies and think about who can help us to get closer to the organizations that can help women and join ranks with us. It was a huge success and a bit of a surprise when grassroots women's organizations created a network with radical feminist groups.

Networking with organizations enables us to tap into the knowledge of others. We have new allies among the labour unions and with a union organizing military workers. In Norway, the confederation of trade unions voted in favor of the criminalization of buyers of prostitution. Men are also needed in the fight against trafficking and prostitution. Nevertheless, despite the law in Norway to criminalise the buying of sex, it is not magic. It cannot stop wars or natural disasters, and more women are trafficked every day. Trafficked women in Norway are younger and stay for a shorter period before they are shipped somewhere else. People are desperate for a means of living and are exploited by traffickers.

### THE LAW NEEDS TO BE CHANGED

*By Rogelie Mondejar*

**Philippines:** The perpetrators of prostitution – pimps and johns – should be punished. We must end violence and prostitution and pass the anti-prostitution bill now. Women are not criminals in the system of prostitution and the law needs to be changed.

We have the voice and the power to fight for other victims in prostitution with the coalition. There is strength in the collective.

### I AM LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT

*By Noor Begum*

**India:** I come from a very poor family. I don't want to stay in prostitution. I really want to leave the brothel, but the brothel owner forces me to earn money. I am looking for a way out, but if I don't earn money, I will have nothing to eat. As soon as I get another livelihood, I will get out.

I don't want my children to have the same fate as me, so I send them to school. My daughter is with my father in the village and my son is studying in Kolkata. I like the support I get from Apne Aap and being a part of a group with other sisters.

### THIS IS A MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY

*By Rami Chhabra*

**India:** The issue of prostitution is the least understood because people are not comfortable talking about it. Prostitution is a mix of both political and economic issues.

I want people to look at HIV/AIDS. Funding from HIV foundations was used to create Sonagachi and became the international ideal for how prostitution should be tackled.

This is a moment of opportunity. The Supreme Court is currently hearing a petition on prostitution and the final hearing is scheduled for May. Bill Gates, the main funder, has withdrawn funding and wants the government to take over. We need to ask, "Who made how much money?" The atmosphere in the country has finally come to the point where you can ask those questions.

## THE NEED FOR SOLIDARITY IN RESCUING WOMEN

*By Nim Yu*

**South Korea:** It is time to push the Korean government to support foreign women. A huge number of foreign women who come to Korea are being prostituted, but the government doesn't care about the problem. Currently there is only support for foreign women who are married to Korean men.

All of the stories that I collect from women are very similar. They came to Korea as labourers or to marry Korean men, but they are involuntarily forced to enter into the sex industry.

One Korean woman was rescued from Tokyo, where she was made to work in a brothel owned by a Korean woman. She asked to be rescued, so we made a phone call to our sister organization in Japan, and they immediately tried to help. We called the Korean consulate in Tokyo and the Japanese embassy in Seoul to work together. Finally she was rescued and returned home to Korea.

There is a need for solidarity in rescuing women who are trafficked across borders.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORKS TO ADDRESS TRAFFICKING ARE ABSENT OR INADEQUATE

*By Su Ting Yu*

**Taiwan:** The Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation (TWRF) offers reintegration services such as vocational training (nail art, beautician training, etc.) and job search assistance. Residents are permitted to choose their own field of interest. In addition, we offer art, music, and dance therapy, psychiatric care, trauma and recovery services, and relationship groups. TWRF also educates women about their human rights in order to prevent re-trafficking.

In many countries, legal frameworks to address trafficking are absent or inadequate. We are exploring collaboration with local NGOs in the home countries of the women.

## EDUCATION IS THE FIRST STEP

*By Belen Antoque*

**Philippines:** Lawig Bubai is an organization for children and women who are working in prostitution. We work on education to increase women's awareness. Education is the first step in organizing women and children who are in prostitution.

**Ruchira Gupta:** "We have the right to demand all resources available from government. Marginalised women can only start a journey to economical integration after they have been mobilised and they demand their rights from the government."

## LEGALIZATION IS NOT THE ANSWER

*By Sheila Jeffreys*

**Oceania:** The movement for the legalization of prostitution is run by the sex industry, which clearly benefits from legalization.

In Germany alone, the sex industry generates €6 billion annually, and in the Netherlands, 5% of the gross domestic product comes from the sex industry. In China, there are between 200,000 and 300,000 prostituted women in Beijing alone.

Prostitution has been industrialised and moved away from small-scale individual operators to huge brothels. The normalization of the industry makes it acceptable to profit from sex, but the profit doesn't go to the women.

Those advocating for legalization are not interested in the human rights of the women involved in prostitution. To them, women are merely the raw materials of the sex industry. If women gain rights in one country, the men of that country will simply exploit women from other countries.

Around the strip clubs there is a lot of violence, not only against the women but among the criminal gangs involved in the business.

**Jean Enriquez:** "We are reaching out to many women's groups in fighting poverty."

**MOST OF THE VICTIMS ARE WOMEN**

*By Youngsook Cho*

**South Korea:** Economic development does not naturally bring gender equality. In domestic violence and prostitution, most of the offenders are male and most of the victims are women.

“Corporate Korea” is like a company where most of the young generation feels like losers because they can’t get jobs. Women try to get married as a job or a “job-marriage.” Women who do not get married can only go into the sex industry.

Many women’s groups are divided. Domestic violence groups are competing with the prostitution and trafficking groups because there is only one budget for government funding. There is a need for reconnection. Prostitution has to be connected to the whole of women’s rights issues.

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<b>Publisher</b>	Apne Aap Women Worldwide
<b>Address :</b>	D-56 Anand Niketan, New Delhi 110021 India
<b>Phone</b>	011-24110056
<b>RNI Number</b>	DELMUL/2008/27727
<b>Printer</b>	Impress Printers, New Delhi