

The Sex Worker Network Son, as a Korean sex worker network, demands that the UN Women's attention

We are the Korean Sex Worker Network Son. We are a group of sex workers of various identities who are active online and offline. As members of the international society, we believe that our rights are not far from women's rights and to speak of that issue we send this message despite physical and geographic boundaries.

Question 1) The 2030 Agenda commits to universality, human rights and leaving nobody behind.

How do you interpret these principles in relation to sex work/trade or prostitution?

To speak of human rights which do not leave anybody behind, we must first consider how to concept of human rights are constructed. We believe that as a concept, human rights operate correctly when a value or rule is applied to all humans equally without exclusion. Human rights must be applied without exception due to gender, sexual orientation, class, race, past crimes, field of work, and etc and to defend such a conceptualization we declared concepts such as natural and inherent human rights. In Korea, many sex workers have been excluded. Immigration has been increasing in Korea yet structural help for immigrants are poor and immigrants who have been prosecuted for working in sex work are forcefully deported. Unfortunately, it has already happened multiple times this year. This issue is closely related to issues of class. We work for money and the poverty we have experienced and the social structures which produce poverty play large roles in our choices to work as sex workers despite the discrimination and stigma. Many sex workers are women who have been excluded from the labor market and have been given no chance, many of whom to turn to sex work from low wages, having no alternative despite the fact that sex work is illegal in Korea and can leave sex workers with a crime record, jail time, or multiple fines.

The exclusion of sex workers is not merely an exclusion of people based on what job they choose to engage in, but rather leads into excluding discussions of how social structures lead people to the sex work industry, especially aspects of gender, sexuality, race, crime, etc.

Question 2) The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out to achieve gender equality and to empower all women and girls. The SDGs also include several targets pertinent to women's empowerment, such as

- a) reproductive rights
- b) women's ownership of land and assets
- c) building peaceful and inclusive societies
- d) ending the trafficking of women
- e) eliminating violence against women.

How do you suggest that policies on sex work/trade/prostitution can promote such targets and objectives?

An easy connections between reproductive rights and sex workers' rights can be made in the context of Korea. One such example is the fact that a central piece of evidence utilized in convicting sex workers are condoms. As such, many Korean sex workers, to avoid police prosecution, have chosen to swallow condoms in situations where the threat of arrest existed. However, as the existence of condoms has become evidence which can lead to prosecution, many sex workers have chosen to not hide or get

rid of their condoms when threat of police activity exists, but rather forgo using condoms altogether, driving the rate of sex workers who do not use condoms quite high in Korea. Also, in fields of sex work which the sex worker is not paid well, not using a condom has become the default state, as many sex workers who work in such situations, due to issues financially, racially, immigration status wise, etc are not able to demand what should be considered their right. In such situations, an improvement of the rights of sex workers leads to an improvement in their ability to demand their basic rights such as the right to contraceptives..

On another note, it is impossible to talk about women owning capital or real estate in Korea without talking about forced removals in the situation of Korea. Korean real estate prices, especially in the Seoul metropolitan area, are some of the highest in the world, and yet, due to the perception that living in the Seoul metropolitan area is safer than living in the deeply patriarchal countryside, many women choose to live in Seoul despite the wage gap meaning that on average women are making around roughly 60% of what men earn. This has led to a concentration of women living in cheaper, poorer neighborhoods in Seoul. These neighborhoods tend to, after a period of time, go through a process of corporations partnering up with the government and proceeding to forcefully remove residents. The most common justification for these forced removals is the existence of brothels. Many red light districts or concentrated areas of sex workers have been forcefully removed under the name of improving the city or reducing the size of the sex industry leaving very few standing today. Dozens of areas have been subjected to this process of forced removals and as such women sex workers and the women who lived in the surrounding areas, especially old women, have lost their homes and been forced into the few remaining slums in Korea. While all this is happening, their realities are being erased.

To create a peaceful and inclusive society, where must we place our focus? The first answer which comes to mind is that we must turn our eyes to areas of exclusion which are not peaceful. As we've discussed above, sex workers are not only suffering from discrimination against sex work. It is of equal importance to ask why people engage in sex work despite the discrimination as it is to ask why sex work is discriminated against in the first place. Our thoughts point to the connection of those two questions being the meeting point of policies for the rights of sex workers and women's rights.

To get rid of trafficking, especially trafficking of women, it is important to specifically define and monitor trafficking, but it is also important to observe why some trafficked women enter into the sex trade. When the sex industry is illegal and sex work itself is banned, victims of structural violence such as trafficking and those around them become limited in their ability to respond to such violence. To make the situation of a victim of trafficking known, one must prepare to go to jail or be heavily fined. Such a situation prevents people from being able to actually help victims of trafficking.

We wish to respond to the final question while summarizing what has been said. Sex workers and women are not two mutually exclusive groups. A majority of sex workers are women and this is not a coincidence. Rather, it is a result of a society in which women's situation of being discriminated against, excluded from the labor market, and unable to execute their right to property and the labor of sex work meeting. Thus, to eliminate violence against women, it is imperative we eliminate also eliminate violence against sex workers.

Question 3) The sex trade is gendered. How best can we protect women in the trade from harm, violence, stigma and discrimination?

As a hypothetical, if it was possible to pay each and every sex worker an amount in which they could continue their life, if the material basis was established in which sex workers could improve their situation, and it was a situation in which sex workers could quit sex work without issue, we would have no issue with the implementation of such a policy. We beg you to implement such a policy if it exists. However, such an approach has been attempted multiple times and failed as many times as it has been attempted, which prompts us to consider searching for a new way to approach the issue. If it is impossible to protect each and every sex worker individually, then we must consider a method creating a social structure which allows us a society to protect sex workers as a whole while allowing individual sex workers to protect themselves and heal each other. If sex workers are not allowed to work together, to form coalitions or labor unions, to protest for better wages, then the ability to improve the situation of sex workers becomes restricted to the limits of outsiders' abilities to help sex workers. Sex workers' ability to do must be strengthened. We must be allowed to become agents of our own liberation and fight for our rights.

We are extremely sorry for the delay on our statement, caused by language and financial issues. We hope for a day when such a meaningful step can be taken without issue or restriction.

Hoping that our earnest request will be heard,
Sex Worker Network Son.