

The Committee Clerk  
Room 242  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
Belfast BT43XX.

23 October 2013

Dear Chairperson and Committee Members,

**RE: Submission to the Northern Ireland Justice Committee on the *Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill (Further Provisions and Support for Victims)***

On behalf of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, I am writing to support the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill which is currently at consideration stage within the Assembly.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions passed a motion at its 2010 Women's Conference which called for action on human trafficking for the purposes of sexual and labour exploitation to be taken in both jurisdictions of this island (see attached motion). The motion also called for support for the Turn off the Red Light Campaign. We are now active members of the Turn Off the Red Light<sup>1</sup>, which aims at ending prostitution and sex trafficking in the Republic of Ireland. It is being run by an alliance of 68 civil society organisations, trade unions, umbrellas and services with a joint representation exceeding 1.6 million people in Ireland.

Trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation is modern slavery and a prevalent form of exploitation. We believe that the best way to combat this is to tackle the demand for prostitution by criminalising the purchase of sex, and maintaining services to those trafficked and affected by prostitution, ensuring that they are not criminalized.

We are deeply concerned about the spread of the prostitution industry, which exploits women and children and we are adding our voice to those who are seeking to change our legal systems in Northern Ireland to criminalise the purchase of sexual services, while protecting the rights and dignity of those prostituted.

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We therefore welcome the proposed *Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill (Further Provisions and Support for Victims)*, and particularly Clause 6 of the Bill, which would specifically legislate for the criminalization of the purchase of sex, as a measure to discourage demand that fosters sex trafficking and exploitation through prostitution.

However we would endorse the call made by the Women's Aid Federation NI for support systems to be put in place to enable women and children to get routes out of sexual exploitation:

*We strongly urge that further support measures are necessary to support women in prostitution to ensure their safety, health and well-being and to encourage them to seek help without fear of criminalisation, marginalisation or deportation, as well as the creation for clear routes out of prostitution for those that wish to exit. The Swedish or Nordic model is based on simultaneous criminalisation of buyers and decriminalisation of those in prostitution and this support-based model is essential to the success of Clause 6.* Excerpt from NI Women's Aid Federation Position Paper.

We would also like to add our voice to the other groups and organisations endorsing the broad thrust of the position expressed in the Women's Aid position paper which reflects, we believe the majority opinion on this matter. Recently more than 53 MEPs and over 200 Civil Society organisations came together to issue the *Brussels Call: Together for a Europe Free from Prostitution*. By supporting the Brussels' Call, MEPs make it clear that prostitution is a form of violence against women and a violation of human dignity. They address 6 key recommendations to EU Member States: the suppression of repressive measures against prostituted persons; the criminalisation of all forms of procuring; **the development of real alternatives and exit programmes for those in prostitution**; the prohibition of the purchase of a sexual act; the implementation of policies of prevention, education, to promote equality and positive sexuality; the development of prevention policies in the countries of origin of prostituted persons.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.womenlobby.org/news/ewl-news/article/meps-call-for-a-europe-free-from-5535?lang=en>

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Irish Congress of Trade Unions  
Northern Ireland Committee



Attacking the commercialised sex business through the introduction of penalties for the buyer has proven to be an efficient approach that best responds to the nature of a trade which thrives on threats, abuse and violence. This is an essential part of the campaign against human trafficking as the majority of human trafficking victims are trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

While the Policing and Crime Act of 2009 was a welcome advance in Northern Ireland's anti-trafficking legislation its impact has been limited by the requirement of proof of coercion within a very limited timeframe. Thus, unsurprisingly, there have been no successful convictions made in Northern Ireland to date.<sup>3</sup> This failure is in line with that of other countries which have introduced similar legislation, such as Finland and the Republic of Ireland at present. Legislation which is limited to proven victims of coercion has been shown to have little or no effect on demand for trafficked victims.

We believe that every Government owes it to the vulnerable people and children trapped in prostitution, as well as to the society which they represent, to ensure that the demand for sexual services from exploited and trafficked individuals is effectively tackled.

We trust that the Northern Ireland Justice Committee will ensure that the public consultation is concluded in a timely manner, and we hope that the consultation will lead to the passing of the *Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill* as soon as possible.

We are happy to discuss the content of this submission further.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>3</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly Question AQW 15565/11-15