

58 Merrion Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4, Ireland

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

8th October 2013

Dear Chairman and Committee Members,

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

The Irish Countrywomen's Association has been campaigning against sex trafficking, which is the most widely spread form of human exploitation in the European Union. For this reason we are active members of the Turn Off The Red Light¹, 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, 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 and re-victimised.

We are deeply concerned about the spread of the prostitution industry, which exploits women and children in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and we wish to add 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.

¹ www.turnofftheredlight.ie

We therefore readily 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. As the Republic of Ireland's Government considers the introduction of similar legislation, up on unanimous recommendation of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, we would be very encouraged to see this measure come into effect in Northern Ireland.

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.² 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.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,



Liz Wall
National President

² Northern Ireland Assembly Question AQW 15565/11-15