

Press release from A Model For Scotland

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Scotland must heed international experiences on combating sexual exploitation, says alliance of survivors and frontline services

A Model For Scotland (1), an alliance of sexual exploitation survivors, organisations and frontline services, is today (29/11/23) calling on the Scottish Government to heed the experiences of other countries who have introduced laws to combat sexual exploitation and sex trafficking - by implementing a progressive legal model that shifts the burden of criminality off victims of sexual exploitation and on to those who perpetrate and profit from this abuse. The demand comes as A Model For Scotland launches a new report presenting the results of a series of dialogues with international partners on what works to reduce sexual exploitation, which will be launched at an online event today.

The event (2), which will be chaired by Ruth Maguire MSP and features a panel of international expert speakers, is taking place during this year's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence to highlight the fact that perpetrating this form of violence against women by paying for sex is still legal in Scotland. Whilst the Scottish Government has committed to develop a model for Scotland that challenges men's demand for prostitution and supports women to exit sexual exploitation (3), this is yet to be translated into meaningful action. A Model For Scotland's report findings provide important learning for Scotland as it develops its own model to combat sexual exploitation.

- In 1999, Sweden was the first country to adopt a legal model to combat demand for prostitution by criminalising paying for sex – whilst decriminalising victims of sexual exploitation. The results of Sweden's law provide over two decades of evidence on the adoption and implementation of this legislative approach which show that the proportion of men paying for sex has dropped, public attitudes have changed and the law acts as a deterrent to sex trafficking. A growing number of countries have since followed Sweden's lead by adopting similar legal frameworks, building on Sweden's experiences to improve the legal model, including France, Norway, Ireland, Northern Ireland and Iceland, some of which feature in A Model For Scotland's report.
- One of the countries that has followed Sweden's lead is France, who in 2016 decriminalised soliciting for prostitution, criminalised paying for sex, and established comprehensive support provisions for victims of sexual exploitation. The law also established a national policy on prevention, education and training to prevent sexual exploitation. The law resulted in an

immediate change in law enforcement activity, shifting from a focus on penalising victims of sexual exploitation to holding sex buyers accountable. Exiting prostitution programmes have proved successful and there is a high level of public support for France's new 'abolitionist' laws to combat prostitution.

- Scotland has multiple international obligations to discourage demand for sexual exploitation:
 - United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children ('Palermo Protocol')
 - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
 - Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings

Mia de Faoite, Survivor of prostitution and Training Coordinator at Ruhama in Ireland, said:

"The voices of those who have endured the sex trade are clear and the international evidence is clearly laid out in the report - but what is also clear is the continuing violence and suffering inflicted on a growing number of women trapped in the Scottish sex trade.

"Ireland, along with other nations, has adopted laws to prevent sexual exploitation which are proving to be successful. When nations come together and learn from each other so as to step onto the right side of history, good things tend to happen. Doing the right thing is always contentious but sometimes we must do it anyway."

Ruth Maguire MSP, Co-convenor of the Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, said:

"The excellent International Insights report is essential reading for all with an interest in ending men's violence against women. Learning from international examples, can, I believe helpfully guide us as we develop and implement a model to end the violence of prostitution that's right for Scotland – a model that effectively shifts the burden of criminality off victims of sexual exploitation and on to those who perpetrate and profit from this form of violence against women."

Diane Martin CBE, Survivor of prostitution and sex trafficking and Chair of A Model For Scotland, says in the report foreword:

"Learning from the experiences of other countries who have taken action to combat commercial sexual exploitation is crucial as Scotland develops its own model to combat this human rights abuse, enabling the opportunity to build on existing legislative approaches. Drawing on international insights shows us that strong political leadership is crucial in securing – and effectively implementing – policies to

address sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. When this happens, reforms work to end the demand for prostitution and sex trafficking.

“As a survivor of prostitution and sex trafficking and Chair of A Model For Scotland, I urge the Scottish Government to be courageous in bringing about progressive and historic legal change that will prevent countless women from being immeasurably harmed in the sex trade – and send the crucial message that women are not for sale. I hope that this report gives confidence to Scottish law makers that the international evidence base is there, and the time for change in Scotland is now.”

Héma Sibi, Advocacy Coordinator at the Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution (CAP International), told A Model For Scotland for the report:

“The first aim of the law in France was to shift the criminal burden from the victims to the perpetrators and thus to decriminalise prostituted persons. Before the Equality Model¹ in France, nearly 2000 prostituted persons were arrested per year on prostitution activities, compared to none after... Since we adopted the law, there are almost 5000 sex buyers who have been arrested in France...

“What we can see is that since we adopted the law, 600 women have benefitted from an exit programme and almost 90% of those who have finished an exit programme and who are supported by our French grassroots organisation have found a stable job at the end of this exit programme...

“It is a very protective framework. It has produced encouraging results in France, and it is the one model that serves women’s rights and social justice...”

Sigríður Björk Guðjónsdóttir, Iceland’s National Police Commissioner, told A Model For Scotland for the report:

“A very important gender equality milestone was reached in 2009 when the purchasing of sex was made illegal... I firmly believe that this change, when the purchasing of sex was made illegal, is very important to deter sex buyers, to prevent sex trafficking, and that it was a necessary and important step...

“Before the changes, the police and the judicial system were not putting any emphasis on prostitution... After the changes many investigations have been launched and they have produced many cases because the seller of sex is more likely to cooperate with police.

“The seller can trust the police better, they can provide their testimony which they could never have done before because they were also then being criminalised...”

¹ The ‘Equality Model’ refers to the legal approach first pioneered in Sweden which combats demand for prostitution and sex trafficking by criminalising paying for sex – whilst decriminalising and providing support services to those involved in the sex trade.

This is giving us a better chance to bring cases to court, both where sex is bought and also human trafficking.”

ENDS

Notes to editor

1. A Model For Scotland is an alliance of survivors, organisations and frontline services calling for a progressive legal model that shifts the burden of criminality off victims of sexual exploitation and on to those who perpetrate and profit from this abuse. The campaign calls on the Scottish Government to prevent sexual exploitation and deliver justice to victims by enacting the following reforms:
 - Decriminalise victims of sexual exploitation by repealing Section 46 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.
 - Wipe previous convictions for soliciting from victims’ criminal records.
 - Outlaw online pimping.
 - Criminalise paying for sex.
 - Provide comprehensive, resourced support and exiting services for victims of sexual exploitation.

The A Model For Scotland alliance includes: The Encompass Network, Routes Out, TARA (Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance), Women's Support Project, Unite Scotland, Survivors of Human Trafficking in Scotland (SOHTIS), North Lanarkshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council, SAY Women, ASSIST, Scottish Women's Convention, Wise Women, Restore Glasgow, Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Angus Violence Against Women Partnership, Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee, Fife Rape and Sexual Assault Centre, Women’s Aid Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire and Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre.

Further information about A Model For Scotland can be found here:

<https://www.amodelforscotland.org/>

2. At 12.30 – 1.30 GMT on Wednesday 29 November 2023, Ruth Maguire MSP, Co-convener of the Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, will chair an online event to launch A Model For Scotland’s report called: *International Insights: How Scotland can learn from international efforts to combat commercial sexual exploitation*. Speakers at the event will also include:

- Mia de Faoite, Survivor-activist and Training Coordinator at Ruhama – Ireland
- Claire Quidet, President for Mouvement du Nid - France
- Drífa Snædal, Spokeswoman for Stígamót - Iceland
- Taina Bien-Aimé, Executive Director at Coalition Against Trafficking in Women - US
- Nina Humphries, Deputy Director at UK Feminista

For further details about the event and to book a place visit:

<https://international-insights.eventbrite.co.uk/>

An embargoed copy of the report is available on request.

3. The Government's 2021 election manifesto pledged: *"We will develop a model for Scotland to tackle this form of violence against women and girls, and consider how aspects of international approaches which seek to challenge men's demand for prostitution would be best applied in Scotland."* Accessible at:

https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04_15_snp_manifesto_2021_a4_document?mode=window

The Scottish Government's recently developed policy principles on challenging men's demand for prostitution outline that *"those perpetrating exploitation (such as sex buyers and profiteers) will be held to account"* and that *"those involved in exploiting, recruiting, managing, coercing and/or forcing individuals into prostitution, forms of human trafficking, and those who commit violent and sexual offences against this group receive punishment proportionate to their crime"*. Accessible at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/challenging-mens-demand-for-prostitution-policy-principles/>