

## **End legal impunity for pimps and punters in Scotland, say prostitution survivors**

An alliance of survivors and front-line organisations are today (6/9/21) calling on the Scottish Government to overhaul Scotland's 'outdated and unjust' prostitution laws (1). Under existing legislation, running a pimping website and paying for sex are legal activities in Scotland, while women exploited through the sex trade can themselves face criminal sanctions for soliciting (2). Survivors and services working directly with victims of sexual exploitation are now calling for urgent changes. They want the Government to shift the burden of criminality off victims and place it on to those who perpetrate or profit from sexual exploitation. The call for reform comes in the wake of a Scottish Government election manifesto pledge to develop 'a model for Scotland' that challenges men's demand for purchasing sex (3).

'Equally Safe', the Scottish Government's strategy to tackle violence against women, recognises prostitution as a form of violence against women (4), and in June this year Community Safety Minister Ash Denham MSP announced in Parliament: *"We are committing to develop a model specifically for Scotland that will reduce the harms of prostitution, support women to exit it and, crucially, challenge men's demand for purchasing sex."* (5)

The Minister's announcement followed a damning inquiry by the Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation which found that commercial pimping websites – which contain online 'catalogues' of women being advertised for prostitution - incentivise and facilitate sex trafficking in Scotland yet are allowed to operate freely under Scottish law (6).

Diane Martin CBE, a Scottish survivor of sex trafficking and prostitution (7), is now chairing an alliance of leading frontline agencies that work with women exploited through prostitution and trafficking to demand action from Government. The agencies – including TARA, the Encompass Network, Routes Out and Survivors of Human Trafficking in Scotland – are calling on the Scottish Government to:

- 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
- Criminalise online pimping
- Criminalise paying for sex
- Provide comprehensive, resourced support and exiting services for victims of sexual exploitation

4% of men in Scotland report having paid for sex in the past five years, according to latest figures (8). In 2020, Police Scotland identified 84 women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation (as of 30 November 2020). Detective Chief Superintendent Sam McCluskey of Police Scotland said: *"We believe the number of women, and girls,*

*identified as being trafficked and sexually exploited is under-estimated. We know there are many more victims.” (9)*

**Diane Martin CBE, a Scottish survivor of sex trafficking and prostitution and a Vice Chair of the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council, said:**

“Now is the time for Scotland to develop a new approach to prostitution, ensuring victims no longer face criminal sanctions but are provided with tailored support to exit; and where pimps, sex buyers and pimping websites are no longer able to operate and exploit with impunity.

“I am a survivor of so-called ‘*high class*’ prostitution in the UK and of overseas trafficking. I have also spent over 25 years providing frontline exiting services and have witnessed first-hand the devastating reality for women. I want to be part of a Scotland that completely rejects the idea that women and girls can be for sale, treated as commodities by men who believe this is their right and entitlement.

“It is this demand that fuels the sex trade and Scotland must create a hostile environment for those who exploit victims. We must stand together to ensure this exploitation ends. The cost of inaction is too high.”

**Bronagh Andrew, Operations Manager for TARA (Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance) and Routes Out, said:**

“Vulnerable women are being sexually exploited on a daily basis across Scotland by our domestic sex industry. They are exposed to significant risk on a daily basis, including being criminalised, whilst the male buyers continue to remain invisible and act with impunity.

“A Scottish Model which recognises the inherent gender inequality and harm of prostitution and takes robust action against those who choose to pay for sex and those who profit from this exploitation is necessary so we can prevent further harm.

“We need to enable women to recover from the trauma they have experienced whilst addressing harmful attitudes towards women which have no place in a modern and progressive Scotland.”

**Rhoda Grant MSP, Co-Convener of the Scottish Parliament’s Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, said:**

“Scotland’s laws on prostitution are stuck in the dark ages. While the Scottish Government have recognised that prostitution is violence against women for decades, our laws have not reflected this policy. This needs to change and we need laws that penalise those who create demand and decriminalise those who fall victim to this abusive trade. I look forward to Scotland following the lead of more enlightened countries who already take this approach which protects all women by creating a more equal society.”

**Heather Williams, Coordinator of the Encompass Network - Scotland's network supporting those involved in the sex industry - said:**

“The Encompass Network support the most vulnerable and silenced women involved in selling or exchanging sex in Scotland, we advocate for policies and measures that give all women and girls a real choice not to be bought or sold for sex and believe that this package of measures will help achieve this. Only when nobody is forced by coercion or by circumstance to sell or exchange sex can we have a more equal society.”

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors**

(1) ‘A Model for Scotland’ is a survivor-led alliance calling for a progressive legal model in Scotland to combat commercial sexual exploitation:

[www.amodelforscotland.org](http://www.amodelforscotland.org) (launching 6/9/21).

Members of the ‘A Model for Scotland’ alliance include:

- The Encompass Network - *Scotland's network supporting those involved in the sex industry*: <https://www.encompassnetwork.info>
- Survivors of Human Trafficking in Scotland (SOHTIS): <https://sohtis.org>
- SAY Women - *Supporting Homeless Sexually Abused Young Women*: <https://www.say-women.co.uk>
- TARA (Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance): *Support for women who have been trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation.* <https://www.tarascotland.org.uk>
- Fife Rape and Sexual Assault Centre: <https://www.frasac.org.uk>
- Routes Out – *Support for women involved in prostitution*: <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/article/23783/Routes-Out>
- ASSIST: <https://www.assistscotland.org.uk>
- Women's Aid South Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire: <https://www.wasler.org.uk>
- Women's Support Project: <http://www.womenssupportproject.co.uk>
- Scottish Community Safety Network: <https://www.safercommunitiesscotland.org>
- The Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation: <https://www.cpg-cse.com>

The alliance is launching its call for action at an online event on Monday 6 September 2021, 11:00-12:30. The event will feature an international panel of survivors and practitioners, including:

- Diane Martin CBE (Chair), Scottish survivor of prostitution and sex trafficking and a Vice Chair of the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council
- Sigríður Björk Guðjónsdóttir, the National Police Commissioner of Iceland
- Bronagh Andrew, Operations Manager for TARA and Routes Out

- Sandra Norak, survivor of prostitution and member of the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council
- Tsitsi Matekaire, Global Lead - End Sex Trafficking, Equality Now
- Mia de Faoite, Policy Advisor and survivor of prostitution

(2) Soliciting in a public place is illegal under Section 46 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.

(3) The Scottish Government's 2021 election manifesto contained the following pledge: *"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."* Source: [https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04\\_15\\_snp\\_manifesto\\_2021\\_a4\\_document?mode=window](https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04_15_snp_manifesto_2021_a4_document?mode=window)

(4) Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/>

(5) Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid) 17 June 2021: <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/what-was-said-and-official-reports/what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-17-06-2021?meeting=13239&iob=120022#5605>

(6) *Online Pimping: An inquiry into Sexual Exploitation Advertising Websites*, Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, 2021. Accessible at: [https://43b7aa2e-6040-4325-8d69-b57333b95a64.usrfiles.com/ugd/43b7aa\\_2aa3793584184082877ba83216ca7912.pdf](https://43b7aa2e-6040-4325-8d69-b57333b95a64.usrfiles.com/ugd/43b7aa_2aa3793584184082877ba83216ca7912.pdf)

(7) Diane Martin was awarded a CBE in 2013 for services to vulnerable women in prostitution. Martin is a Vice Chair of the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council, established by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Further information about the Council can be accessed at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/475931>

(8) Source: *Natsal-3: Key findings from Scotland*, January 2015. <https://www.natsal.ac.uk/natsal-survey/natsal-3>

(9) *Teenagers among 84 women exploited by sex trafficking gangs in Scotland despite Covid lockdown*, The Herald, 30 November 2020.