WOMEN’S RIGHTS ORGANIZATION APPLAUDS NEW AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL POLICY TO PROTECT SEX WORKERS’ RIGHTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) tonight applauded the publication of Amnesty International’s new policy on decriminalization of sex work and the protection of sex workers from human rights violations and abuse.

According to Amnesty International, the policy calls on governments to take specific actions in protecting the human rights of sex workers including decriminalization of consensual sex work, the engagement of sex workers in the development of laws and policies that affect their well-being, ending discrimination and gender inequality and ensuring that sex workers live free from harm, exploitation, and coercion. The policy also reinforces Amnesty International’s demand that governments ensure everyone’s economic, social, and cultural rights; and investigate and prosecute human trafficking and facilitate remedies to victims.

Tonight’s formal announcement follows a recommendation last August by the Amnesty International Council to its board of directors to adopt a policy supporting the decriminalization of sex work.

“Tonight, sex workers and human rights won. CHANGE was proud to stand with Amnesty International last summer and we are proud to stand with them – and with sex workers – tonight,” said CHANGE President Serra Sippel. “CHANGE is a women’s rights organization that, like Amnesty International, believes that decriminalization of sex work is a human rights issue. We also know that it’s good public health policy.”

Research shows that decriminalization of sex work can dramatically reduce HIV infections globally. International agencies including UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNDP, the WHO and the World Bank have recognized the role that decriminalization plays in advancing public health outcomes and also advancing the human rights of sex workers.

Amnesty International’s new policy includes case studies from a diverse set of countries including Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong, Argentina, and Norway. The case studies demonstrate the negative impact that criminalization and partial legalization has on the health, safety, and human rights of sex workers, underscoring the need to decriminalize sex work.

“Decriminalization paves the way for sex workers to be able to report violence and abuse – whether at the hands of clients, pimps, partners, or police,” said Sippel.
“It will help sex workers access much-needed health services and will help identify someone being trafficked so they can access the services they need.”

In March, CHANGE hosted a panel discussion in Washington, D.C. on the impact of criminalization on the HIV epidemic. The panel brought together sex worker advocates, global health experts, and policymakers.

CHANGE has spent more than a decade actively opposing the Anti-Prostitution Loyalty Oath (APLO) which requires organizations receiving U.S. global AIDS funds to have a policy opposing prostitution – a policy that undercuts public health practices. The United States Supreme Court found in 2013 that the APLO violated the constitutional rights of U.S. organizations and their foreign affiliates but it still applies to foreign NGOs that receive U.S. funding.

“CHANGE is committed to breaking barriers to the health and rights of women and girls everywhere,” said Sippel. “Sex workers are no exception.”

About CHANGE: CHANGE is a Washington, D.C.-based women’s rights organization that promotes sexual and reproductive rights as a means to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by shaping public discourse, elevating women’s voices, and influencing the U.S. government. CHANGE works across global health issues including family planning, maternal health and rights, HIV prevention and treatment, gender-based violence, and access to abortion.

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