

# COALITION N

*Against Trafficking*

*in Women*

May 15, 2004

To the Prime Minister:

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) notes with great concern the increasing efforts to legalize prostitution and decriminalize the sex industry in Hungary. As an international organization with members in most regions of the world, CATW represents hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals in many different countries who are opposed to sex trafficking, prostitution and the expansion of the global sex industry. We oppose tolerance zones, as well as decriminalization and legalization of pimps and brothels because such venues and activities systematically violate the human rights of women and children under the false heading of “liberating” them.

In 1999, the Hungarian Parliament started the process of legalization of prostitution by making prostitution legitimate in so-called “tolerance zones.” Each city in Hungary that had allegedly had large numbers of women in prostitution was mandated to develop these zones of prostitution. The unstated and invisible reality in these cities is not the large number of women in prostitution, but the large sex industries. The power of the sex industry to seek out its legal market share is what is driving the expansion of prostitution into more cities across the country.

In effect, these zones are actually “sacrifice zones” where certain women and children are offered up for the sexual satisfaction of mostly men who can buy them. The creation of tolerance zones began the current expansion of the sex industry into other Hungarian cities, with advocates of prostitution claiming that their municipal numbers were large enough to warrant tolerance zones.

The law permitting tolerance zones is a very harmful law. The Hungarian law that made tolerance zones legitimate is a law that surrenders women and children to the exploitation of sex industry. Instead of protecting women and children, it institutionalizes sexual exploitation by claiming that these zones give protection to those in prostitution. In reality, tolerance zones mostly protect pimps, customers and sex venues. These zones segregate prostituted women from the mainstream of society and confine them to brothels where there is no future for them. The institutionalization of tolerance zones is the first step in the campaign of the sex industry, and those who make enormous profits from it, to gain a legal market share.

Many advocates and politicians, having affirmed the first step towards legalization of prostitution in the tolerance zones, are demanding total legalization of brothels and the decriminalization of pimping. Any form of legalization and decriminalization of prostitution abandons women to what has to be “the most demeaning job in the world.” We hope you do not permit this to happen in Hungary.

The international experience indicates that countries which have legalized prostitution or decriminalized the sex industry are not able to control prostitution by these measures. In effect, prostitution becomes out of control in the legalizing countries. Legalization is followed by increased illegal brothels and sex venues, as well as increased trafficking.

There is no evidence that legalization of prostitution makes things better for women in prostitution. It certainly makes things better for governments who legalize prostitution and of course, for the sex industry, both of whom enjoy increased revenues. Legalized prostitution sanitizes the reality of prostitution. Suddenly, dirty money becomes clean. Illegal acts become legal. Overnight, pimps are transformed into legitimate businessmen and ordinary entrepreneurs, and men who would not formerly consider buying a woman in prostitution think, “Well, if it’s legal, if it’s decriminalised, now it must be O.K.”

When prostitution is treated as “sex work” rather than when it is treated as sexual exploitation and violence against women, the following consequences result.

- 1) Increased violence against women and children in prostitution. Advocates said that state-approved prostitution would reduce violence but instead violence has increased. In studies that have interviewed women in prostitution in both legal and illegal brothels, women consistently indicated that establishments did little to protect them.
- 2) An expansion of illegal brothels. Legalizing prostitution creates a permissive legal climate that serves as a magnet for organized crime to set up its own forms of both legal and illegal brothels and sex clubs knowing that police will no longer monitor the brothels. For example, in the State of Victoria in Australia where prostitution has been legalized since the 1980s, the number of illegal brothels is now three times greater than the number of legal brothels.
- 3) An expansion of child prostitution. The number of children in prostitution in Amsterdam has increased by more than 300% since legalization, going from 4,000 children in 1996 to 15,000 in 2001. Of all states in Australia, the rates of child prostitution are highest in Victoria where prostitution has been legalized.
- 4) The creation of red light districts in European countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and Austria has opened the floodgates to more prostitution, more exploitation, and more trafficking in women and children. Once prostitution is legalized in Hungary, more and more women will enter the sex industry, more parents will force or persuade girls into prostitution for the economic survival of

the family or simply to earn money, and more men will treat women and girls as sex objects.

- 5) Legalization increases trafficking. 80% of women in prostitution in the Netherlands are from other countries, most who have been trafficked there. 75% of the women in prostitution in Germany are from other countries, most who have been trafficked there.

With increased legalization, Hungary will become a paradise for sex tourists. Given the financial state of the country, the sex industry may become the centerpiece of the economy. Government will thus become enormously dependent on the revenues of the sex industry.

It is not too late to turn back from the path of legalization of prostitution. Instead of more legalization of the sex industry, the Hungarian Parliament should reconsider the law that decriminalizes tolerance zones and seriously study and implement the Swedish Model that penalizes the customers. There is no supply without demand. Legislators often leap onto the legalization bandwagon because they think nothing else is successful. But there is a legal alternative. Rather than sanctioning prostitution, states could address the demand for prostitution by penalizing the men who buy women for the sex of prostitution.

Sweden's Violence Against Women Government Bill prohibits and penalizes the purchase of "sexual services." The Swedish legislation criminalizing the buyers is based on the policy that "Prostitution is not a desirable social phenomenon" and is "an obstacle to the ongoing development towards equality between women and men. Furthermore, the law against purchasing sexual services is part of a wider Violence Against Women Bill that allocates resources to support the development of alternatives for women in prostitution.

Results of the Swedish legislation thus far have been promising. The prohibition against men buying prostituted women has received strong social support. Several polls, conducted in 2000 and 2001, show that approximately 80% of the Swedish population supports the law. Most importantly, women who are attempting to leave prostitution support the law.

Street prostitution has declined in the three years since the law was passed. The number of prostituted women has decreased by 50%, and 70-80% of the buyers have left public places. Police have also stated that the Swedish law prohibiting the purchase of sexual services has had a chilling effect on trafficking. According to police, were it not for the law, Sweden, like Norway and Finland, would experience major trafficking of Russian women across the border. .

In 1956, Hungary signed the 1949 *Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others*. The Convention obliges States Parties to outlaw brothels or houses of prostitution. Article 2 advocates punishment for anyone who "keeps or manages, or knowingly finances or takes part in the financing of

a brothel,” or “knowingly lets or rents a building or other place or any part thereof for the purpose of the prostitution of others.” Article 6 of this convention obliges countries from regulating prostitution or from subjecting women in prostitution to registration or other administrative controls. Parties to this Convention must “repeal or abolish any existing law, regulation or administrative provision” used to register women in prostitution. Already, with tolerance zones and the “barca” which registers women in prostitution, Hungary is in violation of its ratification of the 1949 Convention.

Legalization and decriminalization of prostitution and the sex industry is an old and failed legal measure that does nothing to address the violation and violence of prostitution. Prostitution is commercial sexual exploitation posing as commercial sexual entertainment. It depends upon women’s inequality and the sexual objectification of women, where women are viewed and treated as sexual commodities.

On May 28, the Movement for a Prostitution-Free Hungary will hold a conference in Budapest with international speakers to address “What is Wrong with Prostitution and Trafficking in Women?” We hope you will join them and us in issuing a strong statement against the legalization of prostitution in Hungary.

The international women’s rights community is watching what Hungary will do. Will Hungary promote sexual equality or sexual exploitation?

Sincerely,  
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