

BC Coalition of Experiential Communities



For Immediate Release

December 14, 2009

Vancouver, BC

RE: The International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers

Thursday December 16, 2009

Vancouver Art Gallery, Robson Street Entrance

Start Time- 6:30pm

The **BC Coalition of Experiential Communities** (BCCEC) and FIRST would like to invite everyone to join us as we march with red umbrellas, adopted in 2002 by Venetian sex workers for an anti-violence march, symbolizing resistance against discrimination for sex workers worldwide.

We will be raising awareness about violence against sex workers by distributing materials amongst holiday shoppers on Robson Street. Fancy dress is definitely encouraged and festively decorated red umbrellas too! This year we will be asking people to think about hate crimes against sex workers. We will be holding a vigil at the Art Gallery on Robson before marching along the street. After the march, we will be meeting at the Lennox Pub at Granville and Robson for hot chocolate and refreshments.

In the BCCEC report, "From the Curb," sex workers who participated listed the following acts as violence;

- Physically being beaten, raped or assaulted by dates, pimps and drugs dealers
- Being ignored, belittled, humiliated, sworn at, shunned by police and public for being a "dirty ho, crack whore, or slut"
- Having items thrown at them from vehicles (very common)

Sex workers commented that even children throw garbage at them. People in cars throw beer bottles, pennies, pop and hot coffee. One respondent lost part of her ear due to an assault by a non sex working woman who threw a beer bottle at her while she was working on the street. Sex workers in our consultation described the pain of being "beaten down by words."

Their words:

- "Any type of mistreatment is violence because people don't care what happens to our kind."
- "Being looked at like you're less."
- "Saying no to allowing us use of their phone or washroom- it leaves us depending on dates and other people who like to harm us."
- "Being mistreated by the public."
- "People laugh at me."
- It's like they take this beautiful thing we have... the ability to give love, and they destroy it."

Sex workers described violence as activities ranging from public humiliation and social exclusion to more extreme incidents of beatings, sodomy, rape, extreme violence and the abduction and murder of their friends.

Overwhelmingly, sex workers agreed that violence against our community should be considered a hate crime. They also noted that doing so puts their violent experiences into a deeper context. They expressed that violence against our population is done with "specific intent to cause harm" due to our social identity and compounded by their sheer vulnerability under Canada's outdated and harmful prostitution laws.

The BCCEC and FIRST are also calling for people to contact the Attorney General by phone or by mail (mike.dejong.mla@leg.bc.ca; 250 387-1866) in support of the call for a public inquiry into the circumstances surrounding Canada's missing women's cases. Only if we can identify where systems are failing to protect vulnerable people in our society will we ever see any increase in safety for Canada's sex workers.

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