



## BC Coalition of Experiential Communities

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For immediate release

December 17, 2010

### **Justice ministers' strategy ignores violence against sex workers** *Open letter calls for action from Canada's governments*

VANCOUVER, December 17, 2010 — On the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, sex worker groups and supporters have issued an open letter calling on Canada's Justice Ministers to include Canadian sex workers in their national strategy on missing and murdered women. (Read the Open Letter on the FIRST website here: <http://xrl.us/bibxpg> )

“We are completely stunned that our governments have ignored violence against sex workers in their long-awaited national strategy,” says Susan Davis, Coordinator of the BC Coalition of Experiential Communities.”

The letter demands that governments immediately initiate discussions with Canadian sex worker organizations to address sex workers' urgent and critical needs for safety and protection on the local, provincial, and national level.

Davis pointed to the tri-lateral governments' research report on missing and murdered women that was commissioned in 2006 to consider: “the effective identification, investigation and prosecution of cases involving serial killers who target persons living a high risk lifestyle, including but not limited to the sex trade.” Subsequently, the report authors were told to consider: “particular concerns related to missing Aboriginal women.”

The report's 52 recommendations are the foundation for the national strategy that governments announced in mid-October, but not a single recommendation addresses the prevention of violence against sex workers. Later in October, the federal government announced \$10 million in national strategy funding, but not a single dollar was allocated to sex worker safety needs.

The necessity to deal with violence against sex workers was overwhelmingly brought home by the Missing Women's Case, which concerns the murders of 65 women sex industry workers in Vancouver during the 1990s. The Open Letter notes that the criminal justice system has made few, if any, changes to protect women and youth from the violence, sexual predation and murder prevalent in the street-based sex industry.

“We know that the physical and sexual violence faced by women in the sex industry is not isolated to major urban centres, says Esther Shannon, a member of FIRST, the national feminist coalition that support sex worker rights.

“It happens in all Canadian communities, including rural communities, and this is especially true for street-based sex workers who experience exponentially high rates of violence.”

While critical of sex worker exclusion from the governments' plans, the groups are fully in support of the resources the strategy will provide for Canada's missing and murdered Aboriginal women and First Nations communities. The Open Letter also strongly calls for renewed funding to the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Sisters in Spirit initiative.

The International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers calls attention to hate crimes committed against sex workers, as well as to the critical need to remove the stigma and discrimination that is perpetuated by customs and laws that have made violence against sex-workers acceptable. The red umbrella, adopted in 2002 by Venetian sex workers for an anti-violence march, symbolizes resistance against discrimination for sex workers worldwide.

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*Signatories to the Open Letter* (which is posted here: <http://xrl.us/bibxpg>)

BC Coalition of Experiential Communities

Exotic Dancers for Cancer

FIRST Decriminalize Sex Work

Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women

HUSTLE: Men on the Move

The Naked Truth Entertainment

PACE Providing Alternatives Counseling & Education Society

PEERS Vancouver

Pivot Legal Society

POWER Prostitutes of Ottawa-Gatineau Work, Educate and Resist

Stepping Stone, Halifax

West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals

WISH Drop-in Centre Society

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*FIRST is a national coalition of feminists that advocates for the complete decriminalization of sex work for both sex workers and clients. FIRST believes that Canada's prostitution laws rob sex workers of their livelihood and prevent them from creating safe and empowering working conditions.*

*BC Coalition of Experiential Communities (BCCEC) is a consortium of sex worker activists that provides a mechanism for the voices of experiential women, so they can support the development of legislation and policies, create peer-driven programs and services, and work towards the elimination of oppressive systems and forces that create harm within the sex industry.*