



PRESS RELEASE

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Sex workers are regularly roughed up, exploited or humiliated. They are after all operating illegally and have no one to turn to when they are in need of help. Now they have decided to step out of the shadows and fight for their rights.

They want their industry to be decriminalized and just two weeks ago, they handed a memorandum to the Cape High Court, calling for an interdict to stop police harassment.

With 2010 fast approaching, calls to decriminalize the sex industry are getting louder.

However, many workers say the laws should change *now*, so that workers can start to create a better life for themselves and tackle their vulnerability.

Vivienne Lalu, a programme coordinator from the Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce or SWEAT, says: "Once you remove the penal code that makes sex work a crime, you allow other existing laws to apply.

"Consequently, labour law can apply... occupational, health and safety requirements come in to play. All those other laws that govern existing businesses can now apply to the sex industry."

Third Degree took to the streets to speak to workers. Sheila works in a brothel and spoke to us about the abuses she has suffered: harassment from the police, little or no assistance from health care providers and abuse from clients.

Third Degree also spoke to Thandi, who has been in the industry for more than 12 years.

Her story is one of sorrow and heartache. She originally started sex work to make money to send back to her family in KZN, but unable to find a job, she has been doing it ever since.

She says she has experienced abuse and harassment so often from the police that she has now laid charges against them.

Sex workers are determined to bring about change.

Recently SWEAT hosted the very first ever Pan African Sex Workers' Conference in Hillbrow, Johannesburg.

One-hundred-and-fifty-three delegates from different African countries spoke about the difficulties they face every day and their desire to access the same human rights as everyone else.

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