

# **“Towards an Abolitionist Approach to Prostitution and Trafficking”**

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## **Prostitution and Methods of Its Regulation**

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In the Czech Republic right now, as in many places in the world, there is a serious human rights crisis. The crimes being committed are forms of slavery - the buying, selling, renting, and exploitation of women and children for profit. The slave owners are the pimps who beat and intimidate the victims to extract a profit. The slave sellers are the traffickers who find victims among the poor, the desperate, and the vulnerable. They bring victims to the Czech Republic, and from here transport them to cities further to the west. The “consumers” are men, most from Western Europe, who come to the Czech Republic to buy the victims for sex. The profiteers are mafias and corrupt officials.

How the Czech Republic decides to respond to this crisis will affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of women and children, not only in the Czech Republic, but also throughout Europe. The decision on how to combat the problems of trafficking and prostitution will determine the character and reputation of cities and towns throughout the country. It will determine where the Czech Republic stands on freedom, democracy, and human rights, particularly for women. And, it will establish the role the Czech Republic will play in the European Union.

The choices made here will send a message far beyond the borders of the Czech Republic to the poorest villages of Eastern Europe, where traffickers recruit victims, to the richest capitals of Western Europe, where women’s bodies are turned into commodities and services to be bought and sold.

Where are you going to stand at this defining moment? You are now in the middle of an international human rights debate over prostitution. Will prostitution become a form of work for women and girls-a job like any other, and you can tell your granddaughter that she too can grow up to be a “sex worker”? Or will prostitution be treated as an activity that is inherently harmful to women, children, families, and communities? And consequently, there should be laws and policies that aim to abolish it.

Are you going to stand for the basic rights of women to be free, and to live fulfilled, productive lives with dignity; or will you choose the easier, and you may think more profitable, path of legalizing a corrupt, degrading, criminal practice than relies on enslaving and exploiting women and children and renting them to mostly foreign tourists?

The Czech Republic is a hub of sex trafficking. It is a sending, transit and destination country. It is a sex tourist destination for men. There is so much prostitution here, that the pimps cannot recruit enough local women to fill up the brothels. They have to bring in victims from other

places. As a destination country with a thriving sex industry, the Czech Republic is creating a demand for victims.

The most important factor in stopping the trafficking of women and children is the policies and laws of the destination country; and of course, the enforcement of those laws. Will the Czech Republic attempt to stop this trade or will it accommodate the trade, and even try to make a profit from it through taxes?

The legalization of prostitution in the Czech Republic is particularly dangerous because of its geographical location and its membership in the European Union. The Czech Republic is already a transit country for the trafficking of victims from Eastern to Western Europe. Legalization of prostitution will open up a gateway for the flow of women from poorer countries to the east into all of the Europe.

Countries that have legalized prostitution in order to regulate it are still faced with serious problems of sex trafficking. Organized crime groups continue to traffic victims and run illegal prostitution operations along side the legal businesses. Where prostitution is legal, both trafficking and prostitution have increased because men can legally buy sex acts and pimps and brothel keepers can legally sell and profit from them.

In Germany, lawmakers thought they were going profit from legalized prostitution from the tax revenue. But recently, the Federal Audit Office estimated that the government has lost over two billion euros a year in unpaid tax revenue from the sex industry, and lawmakers have started to look for ways to increase collection of taxes from prostitutes. Is this the situation in which you want to find yourselves? Cracking down on prostitutes because they will not give you money? That is the usual role of pimps.

The normalization of prostitution as work has not occurred in Germany, the Netherlands, or Australia. Legalization was supposed to provide women with benefits and the right to join unions, but few women have signed up either. The reason has to do with the basic nature of prostitution. It is not work, a job like any other. It is abuse and exploitation that women only engage in if forced to or when they have no other options. Women and children controlled by mafias and criminals cannot register with an authority or join a union. Unionization of “sex workers” is a fantasy, because it is incompatible with the coercive and abusive nature of prostitution.

The U.S. government has adopted an abolitionist approach at the federal level. An abolitionist approach will distinguish victims from perpetrators and treat each group accordingly. Victims should not be criminalized, but offered assistance and services. Perpetrators, including traffickers, pimps, brothel owners, and men who purchase sex acts, should be criminalized.

A strategy of the abolitionist approach is to focus on the demand side of sex trafficking. To design programs and enact laws and policies that penalize the men who purchase sex acts and the exploiters – the pimps, traffickers, and corrupt officials - who profit from this cruel trade.

John Miller, Director of the U.S. State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons sent this statement on the U.S.’s position:

*“The U.S. Government is strongly opposed to the legalization and regulation of prostitution which it believes contributes to the phenomenon of sex slavery. The Trafficking in Persons Office in the U.S. State Department is increasingly focused on the issue of how to reduce the demand for trafficking victims. ...*

*The U. S. Government also opposes the legalization and regulation of prostitution because to legitimize prostitution as an acceptable choice of work is demeaning to women. The Government of the U.S. is mindful of the fact that prostitution is inextricably linked to the abuse by men of women and children. In most states of the United States, both the woman who sells and the male who buys a sexual act are guilty of illegal conduct, and in the past prosecutions have focused on the women sellers. Today the Congress and various local law enforcement authorities are exploring how to direct prosecutions more in the direction of the male customer-exploiter. For these reasons the U.S. Government is following closely the Swedish effort to decriminalize the conduct of the seller of sexual acts and criminalize the conduct of the trafficker, pimp, brothel owner and customer-exploiter. As between the choice of the Dutch legalization of prostitution model and the Swedish model, U.S. Government officials involved in this issue have made clear their preference for the Swedish approach.”*

There is growing abolitionist movement against prostitution and trafficking around the world. Human rights activists from a broad spectrum of ideologies and philosophies are coming together to combat the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children. The Czech Republic is situated to play a key role in combating sex trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women and children. The fact that you are drafting legislation demonstrates that you are acknowledging a problem and trying to deal with it.

The Czech Republic will be wise to get tough against crime and corruption instead of selling out women and children. It takes courage and political will to oppose corruption and to support human rights and freedom. I hope the social and political leaders of the Czech Republic will take this opportunity to become international leaders in the fight against sexual slavery.