

Agnete Strøm

A glimpse of
30 years of struggle
against prostitution by
the women's liberation
movement in
Norway



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By Agnete Strøm

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ABSTRACT

The Women's Front of Norway has worked against prostitution for 30 years. In 2008 a law criminalizing the purchase of a sexual act was passed in Norway. This article describes the struggle and the main actors in lobbying for the law. In the 1980s, we raised awareness of prostitution and trafficking in women in a study of the pornography industry, and targeted sex tourist agencies organizing trips to the Philippines and Thailand. In the 1990s, our members in trade unions got their unions to take a stand against prostitution and legalizing prostitution as "work". In 2006, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions Congress supported a law criminalizing the buyer of a sexual act; this had a strong impact on the centre-left coalition Government. We invited leaders of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women to Norway to meet parliamentarians and trade unionists, and kept up the pressure. From the start, the focus was on ensuring that the situation for women in prostitution was ameliorated. Our demands have been better social services and job training. Street prostitution, especially in Oslo, has been curbed, and a growth in the indoor market has not been reported. Our next task is participating in the awareness campaign "Buying Sex is not a Sport" in connection with the Soccer World Cup, South Africa, 2010. © 2009 Reproductive Health Matters. All rights reserved.

Keywords: *Human rights, law and policy, prostitution, violence against women, trafficking in women*

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A glimpse of 30 years of struggle against prostitution by the women's liberation movement in Norway

The Women's Front is an independent women's organization in Norway, founded in 1972. It is a radical feminist organization, working against all forms of oppression experienced by women and girls in a society dominated by men: economical, social, political, legal and cultural oppression. The organization has been active in the struggle against prostitution for 30 years. When a new law criminalizing the buyer of a sexual act came into effect on 1 January 2009, an important goal was reached. This paper describes our struggle to make it happen.

Until the end of the 19th century, there was a law in Norway regulating women in prostitution. The women were forced to report regularly to the police, and to undergo regular gynaecological and health check-ups. This law was finally dropped in 1899, and public brothels were closed down around the same time.* Since then, women involved

* In Christiania (Oslo), the brothels were closed in 1984 and the control of the women was stopped in 1888. In Bergen, the brothels were closed in 1876. Finally, the control of the women ended in all parts of Norway in 1899.

in prostitution have not been criminalized. Those who profit from prostitution are still penalized, however: both owners of brothels and those who procure buyers for women in prostitution in other ways.[†]

Networking with other organizations and networks internationally has been important throughout our history, as we have been able to tap into a large well of knowledge, political analysis, strategies and experiences. International relations have made it easier for us to situate the Norwegian situation and our experiences in the international struggle against pornography and prostitution, e.g. the effect of liberal economic policies, financial crisis, and international sex industry on women and girls. It has been crucial for us to bear in mind that the porn models and the women in prostitution are women like us, but often living under circumstances most women in Norway only know about theoretically. They are our sisters and not our enemy. Our fight is not against them, but against the perpetrators of these crimes.

The list of important actors in Norway during our 30 years of continuous work against pornography and prostitution is long. We have built alliances with as many individuals and organizations as possible through discussions, actions through meetings, conferences and campaigns. The important actors are the women's movement, feminists in academia, female-dominated and other trade unions, women in the political parties, and women in other countries. The strength we built made it possible for us to lobby the political parties in power. During the last important years we joined forces with the police.

[†] Norwegian Penal Code Article 315.

THE WOMEN'S FRONT AND THE ISSUE OF PORNOGRAPHY

In the early 1970s, the Women's Front worked primarily for women's economic independence. The struggle for women's right to legal, safe and free abortion[‡] brought up the issues around women's bodies and sexuality. Pornography was abruptly put on our agenda in 1977 when two women were fired from their jobs as ticket collectors on the local trains in Oslo after tearing down posters advertising pornographic magazines.[§] In an opinion printed in a daily newspaper¹ they explain their view on pornography:

"We are not able to see any contradiction between on the one hand pornography's and advertisement's use of women's body and on the other hand the puritan's view of women, the first is dependent on the second. The puritan's contempt for nature, sexuality and the woman is also deep rooted in pornography."

Many women's organizations rallied to their support. The two women got their jobs back, and we started to study pornography – what was the message about women and men in pornography, who bought the films and magazines, who produced them, what was the situation of the women who posed and acted?

Pornography was not an important political issue in Norway at the time, but Christian puritans and liberals dominated what public debate there was. The puritans said pornography was

[‡] The law that gave women in Norway the right to legal abortion was passed in 1978.

[§] Liv Alvheim and Rannveig Snortheim.

offensive and contrary to Christian sexual morals, while the liberals claimed pornography was liberating for everybody, especially for women.

Both sides discussed pornography as if it were about being naked or about sexual “variations” and freedom. They never paid attention to the women in pornography, the abuse and violence they suffered or what kind of relations between men and women are propagated through pornographic material. No one mentioned those who profited from the production of pornographic material either. We wanted to find out where all the magazines and films came from, who was behind them, who the customers were, and what pornography was about when seen through radical women’s eyes?

We started to read and analyse pornographic material. We discovered an industry that produced a variety of merchandise in order to satisfy men all over the world. Women of all ages and colours were presented in the magazines and films, even children. And sometimes being sexually available at all times was not enough, there had to be violence and blood in order to satisfy the customers.

We discovered an industry where women were treated as if we were not human beings but seen as mere commodities by the producers of pornography and male buyers – an industry built on serious sexual violence against women by men, where women are presented as “the other”. Buyers do not have to or want to relate to who the women really are; the women are there to fulfil the buyers’ sexual wishes.

We defined pornography as images or films with sexual content and presented in a way that oppresses women. We emphasized that we were not against sexual images *per se*, but only images that eroticize the domination, humiliation and coercion of women.

In 1977, 30 women's organizations in Norway took the political position that pornography presents women and women's sexuality as commodities that can be bought and sold on the market by men to men. The organizations formed a network called Joint Action against Pornography.[¶] Our slogan was: "A woman's body is not for sale".

The study on street prostitution from 1986 by Liv Finstad** and Cecilie Høigård†† provided us with important knowledge; we saw that pornography and prostitution were the backbone of the sex industry. Later the network changed its name to Joint Action against Pornography and Prostitution.^{‡‡}

Our experience has been that it is possible for feminists to work with women of many different political views as long as you have a common goal and have agreed upon a feminist platform – with an understanding that we do not necessarily agree on all other matters, e.g. such as on abortion.

We succeeded in mobilizing ordinary women and men, through many long campaigns, actions and discussions. A slide show was made showing what pornography and prostitution are about, and activists toured the country showing it to the public. We were invited to speak to students in high schools, labour unions and farmers' unions, and the slide show was finally shown on national TV. We met with organized and non-organized women all over the country and had discussions with young conscripted men in the army.^{§§} Finally, in 1985, the struggle against pornography ended up in

¶ Fellesaksjonen mot pornografi.

** Liv Finstad is professor in criminology, University of Oslo.

†† Cecilie Høigård is professor in criminology, University of Oslo.

‡‡ Fellesaksjonen mot pornografi og prostitusjon.

§§ Mandatory military service, 12 months, for all men.

Parliament, when a new law against pornography was passed. We were not satisfied with the wording of the law. The paragraph still contained the term “indecenty”, which implies that pornography has to do with moral issues. But on the other hand the concept “degradation of one or both sexes” was introduced, which was a feminist claim. All in all, we saw the law as a victory after many years of struggle.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Several marriage agencies promised Norwegian men more willing and submissive wives if they went to the Philippines. The pornographic magazines supported these clubs and their view of women. From time to time charter flights were organized by the agencies for Norwegian men to the Philippines. We exposed the organizers in our rallies and held joint actions against the sex tourists with feminists in the Philippines, especially the Philippine feminist network GABRIELA, with whom we worked closely.^{¶¶} Norwegian feminists would demonstrate when the plane took off from Fornebu, Oslo’s airport, and feminists in the Philippines would demonstrate when the men arrived at their hotel in Manila. These actions made big headlines in Norwegian and Philippine newspapers.

The pornographic magazines often included articles promoting prostitution in Thailand and other poor countries. They warmly recommended Norwegian men to buy “prostitutes”. The Scan Thai Traveller’s Club organized charter flights

¶¶ GABRIELA, a network of women’s organizations and female-dominated trade unions was formed in March 1984, and since 2004 a political party.

to Thailand. We demonstrated in the airport, and in rallies. In 1988, the Women's Front and a local women's committee were sued for libel by Scan Thai Travellers' Club because we had described the club as a sex tour agency, and its operations as "trafficking in women" and "racist activities". We won the case! The District Court*** supported our descriptions of the activities of the Scan Thai Travellers' Club: "sex tourism", "trafficking in women" and "racist activities".

The club appealed and the case went on for four more years. It ended in 1992 in the Norwegian Supreme Court. We won there too.³ The different courts did not rule as to whether the activities of the clubs and the club owners were legal, however, since it was a libel case. The verdict was not good for business, and the agency later closed down.

NEW ALLIES: THE TRADE UNIONS

Many members of the Women's Front, who were active in female-dominated trade unions, worked hard to make their unions take a stand on the issues of trafficking in women and girls and prostitution. We knew that the pro-prostitution organizations and the international lobby for the legalization of the prostitution industry were growing fast. We also knew that the Norwegian trade unions could play an important role nationally and internationally in stopping the efforts to legalize prostitution as work, if they wanted to.

In 1998, the International Labour Organization (ILO) published the report *The Sex Sector: The Economic and Social Bases of Prostitution in Southeast Asia* based on

*** Oslo byrett, 16 October 1989.

studies in four Asian countries – Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand. The ILO study put forward a not-too-subtle recommendation to legalize prostitution, citing the industry as an:

"[e]conomic sector... in spite of Asia's economic crises, the economic and social forces driving the sex industry show no signs of slowing down... the sex industry in Asia is effectively internationalized: overseas demand is likely to be unaltered by domestic circumstances and may even be fuelled as exchange rate differentials make sex tourism an even cheaper thrill for customers from other regions." ⁴

The report concluded that those Asian countries with large prostitution industries would benefit from the legalization of prostitution as sex work.

It was autumn 1998, and the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approaching. We and others in the women's movement were mobilising around the full recognition of women's rights as human rights when the ILO press statement entitled *"Sex industry assuming massive proportions in Southeast Asia"* was released on 19 August 1998. Suddenly, the massive efforts by the prostitution industry to recognize sex work as work and to legalise prostitution were being discussed in the media. The press release was picked up by the Norwegian branch of the ILO, translated and printed in their magazine *Working Life*.⁵ The next day the head of the women's desk in the international

office of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions⁺⁺⁺ said to the media:

"All forms of buying of sex and prostitution are violence against women's human rights." ⁺⁺⁺

From 1995 to 2002 the Women's Front and the female-dominated unions in Bergen met once a year in a one-day conference. At the 1998 conference the ILO report was put on the agenda and we all agreed to sign a letter of protest to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and ILO's Director General Michael Hansenne. The letter was headed: *"Prostitution is deprivation of women's human rights" and ended: "Therefore we demand from ILO and other UN agencies: take a clear stand against prostitution – and for women's human rights."*

The letter of protest was picked up by the whole women's movement, including the female-dominated unions in Norway and played a prominent role in the women's movement's celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that year.

It must be underlined that the trade unions have been very important allies in the feminist struggle to end prostitution. An example: in 1994, the Women's Front sent a letter to the Norwegian Ministry of Defence arguing that action should

⁺⁺⁺ Karin Beate Theodorsen, Landsorganisasjonen i Norge, (LO) 20 August 1998. "Alle former for sexhandel og prostitusjon er brudd på kvinners menneskerettigheter."

^{###} Oslo, 20 August 1998. "Alle former for sexhandel og prostitusjon er brudd på kvinners menneskerettigheter."

be taken against Norwegian soldiers on UN peace-keeping missions abroad who purchased women and children for the purpose of prostitution. We got no response. Three years later the trade union that organizes military personnel – the Norwegian Public Employees^{§§§} – demanded that the Ministry of Defence ensure that military personnel in Norwegian and other peace-keeping forces that purchase women for purposes of prostitution should be taken out of service and sent home. Although the Ministry refused, we had gained a lot: the solid façade of labour unions with the attitude “We will not discuss the issue of demand, we will not focus on the purchaser”, had begun to crack.

“For about 20 years, Norwegian personnel on peace-keeping missions have had to comply with a code of conduct regarding the buying of women, and if discovered, they have been sent home, with the incident mentioned in their service record. This was practised, for instance, with Norwegian personnel in the UNAVEM I-III in Angola during 1989–1997.”^{¶¶¶}

*“This code of conduct was active until 2007, when the Chief of Defence issued guidelines on the conduct of Norwegian military personnel in international service. The response to non-compliance with the guidelines^{****} was either disciplinary or criminal charges.*

§§§ Norsk Tjenestemannslag.

¶¶¶ Interview with Hanna Helene Syse, senior advisor, Ministry of Defence, 18 August 2009.

**** The guidelines were operating from 1 July 2007

Since 1 January 2009 however when the law criminalizing the buyer of a sexual act came into effect, the response is automatically criminal charges.”

AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION AND THE EASTERN BLOC

Internationally and nationally several things happened in the 1990s as regards prostitution in Norway. After the former Soviet Union fell apart in 1993, the former Yugoslavia and the Eastern European countries, with their strong political and economical ties to the Soviet Union, found themselves in a very difficult economic situation.

In the small communities in the north of Norway, including those of the indigenous people, the Sami, men began to purchase Russian women for sexual purposes – women who had been trafficked by Russian pimps across the border to Norway. The local women in these communities responded by linking up with the women’s movement and formed the organization Network North, which highlighted the exploitation of women in prostitution.⁺⁺⁺

At the same time, and in the larger cities in Norway, women trafficked from the Baltic countries and from Eastern European countries such as Albania, Romania and Moldova, were visible in street prostitution, and were purchased by Norwegian men. By the end of the 1990s, the majority of women in prostitution in Norway were no longer Norwegian drug-addicted women; the buyers, however, remained mostly local Norwegian men.

⁺⁺⁺ Nettverk i Nord, 1997.

NETWORK AGAINST PROSTITUTION AND TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN

Inspired by the Nordic-Baltic Campaign Against Trafficking in Women^{####}, established in 2002, the Norwegian women's movement formed a new network called Network against Prostitution and Trafficking in Women^{§§§§} in 2002. This network focuses directly on initiatives to eliminate demand, such as through legislation and other measures, and is working for civil and human rights for women in prostitution, especially women brought to Norway from abroad, trafficked or not. A new active partner in this network is the Secretariat of the Shelter Movement.^{¶¶¶¶}

The Secretariat of the Shelter Movement initiated and monitors the ROSA project^{*****} focusing on support and protection for women who are victims of human trafficking, providing them with protection and refuge, when they escape the traffickers and pimps. Through ROSA women victims of

At: <www.nikk.uio.no/?module=Articles;action=Article.publicShow;ID=505>

§§§§ The Women's Front was a founding member.

¶¶¶¶ Kriesesentersekretariatet www.kriesesenter.no. It is the clearinghouse for all the crisis centres in Norway. The crisis centres give protection to women seeking shelter from abusive partners and violent relationships and have given safe houses to many trafficked women since 2005.

***** ROSA, monitored by the Secretariat of the Shelter Movement, was established 2005 as a part of the government's Action Plan against Trafficking of Women and Children 2003 – 2005. The government in this period, 2002–2005, was a coalition between the Christian Democratic Party, the Right Party and the Left Party. In the coalition only the Christian Democratic Party was in favour of criminalization. In 2006 the new three-party government, a coalition with a centre-left domination, came up with a new Action Plan against Human Trafficking 2006–2009. ROSA offers support and protection everywhere in Norway 24 hours a day for women who are victims of human trafficking. Tel: +47-2233 1160. At: <www.rosa-help.no>.

trafficking got a voice, the internet: Women in ROSA. Eleven women were interviewed; all of them trafficked to Norway for prostitution. Their voices have become important ones in the ongoing political debate.⁶

"I have been to the doctor. They took pictures of the scars and bruises on my body. The doctor and the nurse were shocked to see them. But they did not look into my heart; it is not visible in the pictures. The scars there are much deeper."

"It is difficult to think of myself as a human being who belongs in the normal world. Sometimes I see one of my old customers and it reminds me of who I am and where I come from. Today is one of my bad days. It is like I don't belong anywhere, wherever I go I feel different, like an outsider. It is difficult to explain – I don't fit in, the world can never be mine."

"The man, who brought me here, told me he is not alone, he is cooperating with others. He knows where my family lives, and what would happen if I went back and this man still thinks I owe him money? The thought scares me. My parents asked me why I didn't come home for Christmas, they tell me to come back. But I don't dare to."

In Norway in 2003 to 2006, neither the Labour Party nor the Socialist Left Party discussed whether they favoured legislation that criminalizes the buyer. The MPs in the Centre Party, however, took a stand for legislation that criminalized the demand in 2006. For many different reasons, several

female politicians, both from the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party, took a stand against criminalising the buyer. Some of them argued that there was a difference between forced and voluntary prostitution, while others feared a worsening of the situation for women in prostitution. They therefore supported the Network against Criminalization⁺⁺⁺⁺, initiated by a woman formerly involved in prostitution. Activists from this network, also some researchers, were strong lobbyists in Parliament and in the different ministries. They argued hard that trafficking had nothing to do with prostitution and vice versa. The change came when the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions voted in favour of a new law that makes the purchase of a sexual act criminal^{*****}. The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions has 867,000 members and half of the members are women. It has political power and does put pressure on the government. On 1 May 2006, the leader of the Confederation of Trade Unions, Gerd Liv Valla, addressed the May Day rally in Oslo and agitated for criminalization of the buyer^{§§§§§}. This was widely commented upon in the newspapers and added pressure on the government.⁷

In 2006 and 2007, the Women's Front invited key speakers^{¶¶¶¶¶} from the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women to Norway,^{*****} for separate meetings with members of

++++ Nettverk mot kriminalisering, 2003.

++++ At the Congress 2005 the following proposal was adopted in the Plan of Action: "The LO regards criminalization of the buyer as one of several measures to eliminate prostitution." And "LO will combat prostitution by considering criminalization of the buyer, among other measures."

§§§§§ Oslo, 1 May 2006.

¶¶¶¶¶ Janice Raymond, Gunilla Ekberg and Esohe Aghatise.

***** The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) is a non-governmental organization that promotes the fundamental human rights of women

parliament from the Labour Party and the Socialist Left and with leaders of the largest trade unions, such as the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees.⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺ They also met with high-ranking individuals in the police force in Oslo and Tromsø, and presented information from their colleagues in Sweden. We actively used four French documentaries on trafficking and prostitution by the independent documentary film maker Hubert Dubois.⁸ All in all, this made a massive impact on the debate.

The crucial moments took place in March and April 2007, when the national congresses of the Socialist Left Party⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺ and the Labour Party^{§§§§§} took place. A law that criminalized the buyers was on the agenda of both party congresses, due to strong actions from the young feminists in the district branches in the county of Hordaland on the west coast, and the youth organisations in both parties.^{¶¶¶¶¶} In the end, it was the youth branches that convinced the older generation to see the connection between the demand, trafficking and prostitution. With such an active block inside their own parties, both congresses said yes to

to be free from sexual exploitation, including through trafficking in persons. CATW was involved in the negotiation sessions for drafting of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. CATW also targets the demand side such as by monitoring compliance with the Palermo Protocol, strengthening regional and national laws and policies, increasing criminal prosecutions and educating young men and boys to change harmful sexual attitudes about women.

+++++ Fagforbundet i Norge

+++++ Oslo, 24 March 2007.

§§§§§ Oslo, 22 April 2007.

¶¶¶¶¶ The local branches of the youth organization Sosialistisk Ungdom and Arbeidernes Ungdomsfylking in Hordaland.

legislation, and a majority in the parliament and in the government were in favour of criminalizing the purchase of a sexual act.

THE NEW LAW IN NORWAY⁹

"Any person who a) engages in or aids and abets another person to engage in sexual activity or commit a sexual act on making or agreeing payment, b) engages in sexual activity or a sexual act on such payment being agreed or made by another person, or c) in the manner described in (a) or (b) causes someone to carry out with herself or himself acts corresponding to sexual activity, shall be liable to fines or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to both. If the sexual activity or sexual act is carried out in a particularly offensive manner and no penalty may be imposed pursuant to other provisions, the penalty shall be imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year."

The new law, effective from 1 January 2009, states that it is prohibited to purchase a sexual act, and the punishment will be fines or imprisonment up to six months. Importantly, this law criminalizes the purchase of a sexual act in Norway as well as outside the country.

The current minister of Justice Knut Storberget said when the law finally passed, that:

"[h]uman beings are not a commodity and criminalizing the purchasing of a sexual act will make Norway less attractive for the traffickers. Our goal

*is to change attitudes, reduce the demand and thus reduce the potential market for the traffickers. Criminalizing shall not make the situation for women in prostitution worse; therefore the government will develop other alternatives of livelihood for women than prostitution.” ******

CLOSING REMARKS

This law is a great step forward, and has proven to be effective from day one. The police force in Oslo has managed to put an end to much of the street prostitution and is now developing methods to stop the men from using women in indoor prostitution. During the period January–April 2009, 26 men have been arrested in Oslo, pleaded guilty and paid their fines. No one has yet been prosecuted. But the situation varies in different parts of the country and we believe it will take at least five years before we can see the full effect of the law.

The municipal outreach programme in the city of Bergen⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺ has done a survey on the effect of the law since January. The survey¹⁰ found that visible prostitution, both outdoor and indoor, has diminished and there are fewer buyers. The survey was done by doing fourteen semi structured interviews with women, five Norwegian and nine foreign women with experience from either on-street prostitution or off-street prostitution, and they confirmed that the number of clients had dropped. The outreach team also surveyed outdoor prostitution and advertisements for off-street prostitution. The findings for the first six months

***** Press conference, Ministry of Justice, 18 April 2008, Oslo.

+++++ Utekontakten i Bergen.

are: the number of women observed had diminished by 50 %, compared to the same period in 2008, advertisements for off-street prostitution had dropped by 60 % and in this period the police in Bergen had not yet established their surveillance, and only seven men were charged for buying sex. For the coming period however they have established a surveillance group named Exit; and the police underline that their ethical code.

"It is important for us to treat the women, the victims, correctly, ethically and with dignity."¹¹

But the situation for the women is difficult, the way out of prostitution is not yet well established and secured. To give women in prostitution other options than prostitution, the law has to be combined with funding for measures that provide good exit programmes for those in prostitution. For the women to leave prostitution their rights have to be ensured. As the deputy head of the Bergen Municipal Outreach Programme says:#####

"[t]he non-European women who want to leave prostitution experience that they have few or no other ways of earning money. The existing outreach programmes confirm this observation, and show that without the provision of residence permits that allow the women to work there is limited support for this group of women. For this

Nestleder Marit Sagen Grung, Utekontakten i Bergen, 10 August 2009.

group, education and employment are the way out of prostitution, but they lack the access to such services and rights."

"Norwegian drug-addicted women demand treatment for their drug addiction, medically-assisted rehabilitation, extensive resettlement assistance, and permanent lodging, but again, they experience the lack of services."

In Norway we have now got the legislation that prohibits the purchase of a sexual act. This is an important step in the ongoing struggle against prostitution and trafficking in human beings. The next will be the international campaign "Buying Sex is not a Sport", which will target the male public in connection with the FIFA Soccer World Championship in South Africa in 2010. Soccer teams and outstanding sportsmen and women will be important allies in developing the underlying principles and strategies for how to change a culture of prostitution into a culture where no woman, man or child is for sale.

NOTE

The information in this paper was presented at the conference Jornadas Internacionales sobre la Demanda de Prostitución, Comisión para la Investigación de Malos Tratos a Mujeres, Madrid, Spain, 23 September 2008, at the Eaves for Women conference Development in Prostitution Policy, London, UK, 15 May 2009, and at the La Prostitución “El Oficio más antiguo del Mundo” o una Forma de Violencia contra las Mujeres, Comisión para la Investigación de Malos Tratos a Mujeres, Barcelona 2-3 October 2009, The text has been revised and expanded for RHM.

Afterword

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE JANUARY 2009?

In Bergen, the second largest city in Norway, and my hometown, the situation changed after the law during 2009. In 2008: the majority of the women in street prostitution were Nigerian and East-European women, the Norwegian women were all drug addicts.

During 2009 the Outreach Team in Bergen did two surveys: one covering the period March – June 2009 and a second covering the period November 2009 – March 2010. During the first survey the number of women had decreased by 50 %, but during the second survey the number of women had increased.

In fact there has been nearly a complete turn over regarding the foreign women; many left when the law came. But then new groups of Nigerian women arrived and they are younger, and clearly more strained in the meeting with the Outreach Team and they are staying for shorter periods, before they are shipped to another town, another country. This scenario implies a higher level of organisation, and it seems that older Nigerian women that formerly had Bergen as their base, are active behind the scene.

Off-street prostitution did not grow in 2009 on the contrary it diminished. In Oslo they say the reduction is 20 %, in Bergen they say that advertisements in the media have dropped by 60 %.

Bergen police has effectively surveyed the telephone numbers in the advertisements to identify buyers and have charged them. In addition the police have surveyed some of the buyers' mobile traffic further and have charged two men

from Bergen for buying sex from Norwegian children as well. The police work against prostitution, the buying of a sexual act, really shows how a wider focus reveals crime and links of crime. The buyers get connected to child abuse, and child porn, and the organisers behind it get linked to drug traffic through the women they traffic. (Now the women arrive often with heroin in their stomach.)

WHAT ABOUT THE WOMEN?

The situation is difficult, as the way out of prostitution is not well established or secured. For the women to leave prostitution, they have to be ascertained certain rights and good programs.

The non-European women who want to leave prostitution experience that they have few or no other ways of earning money in Norway. Without the provision of residence permits that allow the women to work there is limited ways of support for this group of women, they are illiterate, they suffer from superstition and voodoo curse. For this group, education and employment are the way out of prostitution, but at the moment they lack access to such services and rights.

Until we got the law the media gave only the stereotype image of the women in prostitution: the women were happy and it was their free choice. Little by little the media now let the women's voice be heard, and we get headlines like: "*Women in prostitution do not have any choice*", "*Women in prostitution want ordinary work*". Hopefully some men listened. 122 trafficked women asked the ROSA-project for assistance in 2010¹².

THE BUYERS - THE MEN

Certainly there are fewer buyers. The police was not visible from day one, but little by little they started to act:

In 2009: 334 buyers were arrested, charged and fined in Norway. In 2010: 259 buyers were arrested, charged and fined in Norway. In Bergen the fine is NOK 15.000 (USD 2.500), in Oslo the fine is NOK 25.000 (USD 4.167).

The typical buyer, the john, is according to the police, in his forties, employed in the private sector and often works offshore. He is married, has children and is well off economically.

THE TRAFFICKERS

The police say that action against the johns is a question of resources, but on the other hand their goal is not to arrest as many johns as possible. Their goal is to curb the market and therefore the police are more interested in the pimps and the traffickers, and to make Norway unattractive, actions against profiteers like hotel owners and landlords and to close down prostitution websites are top priorities. The police made an owner close down his Norwegian registered website in December 2010. The police wish to close down another website, but this one is located in the Netherlands, and registered as a US com-site. The police have at the moment no jurisdiction to close this website but have asked the big net distributors NextGenTel, Telenor etc to close it down, but they refuse¹³. The police identified 24 cases of trafficking for prostitution in 2010¹⁴.

In its new Plan of action 2011 – 2014, the government underline that they will conduct *"an evaluation in the near*

*future to see if the effect of criminalisation of buying of a sexual act is matching the intention of the law. The evaluation will also be a useful tool to establish good programs to assist women and men out of prostitution.*¹⁵.

The feminist movement in Norway will over the next years concentrate on work against pornography, on criminalizing strip bars and defend the law that criminalize the buying of a sexual act.

Bergen, 11 February 2011

Agnete Strøm

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WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES FROM THE SOUTH

The Women's Front of Norway/ WF was founded in 1972. While developing a national feminist profile, the Women's Front of Norway established from the very beginning contact with women's organisations outside Norway. In the beginning contacts with women's organisations in the South were concentrating on supporting women's struggle to free their country from foreign occupation or dictatorship in Afghanistan, the Philippines, Eritrea, Palestine, Chile. Funds were collected as well and given to the women's organisations.

WF linked up with international women 's network and organisations working against female genital mutilation (FGM), against trafficking in women and prostitution, to further reproductive rights, on violence against women, for women's economic independence. WF supports the plans of action as laid down in Cairo and in Beijing.

WF is a member of FOKUS, Forum for Women and Development, a resource centre on international women's issues and through FOKUS, funds from the national TV campaign 1989, from Norad and from OD 1999 are channelled.

Since 1991 WF has supported women's projects run by local women's organisations in Africa, Latin America and in Asia, both by funding and by political support. Every women's project is unique, with topics as varied as HIV/AIDS, FGM, prostitution and trafficking, women's reproductive rights, saving- and credit programmes, women's economic independence, women's radio, documentation of women's history and survival strategies. The projects are located in the slums of world cities as Lima and Rio de Janeiro, in the rural areas of Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The projects have made possible adult literacy classes and lobbying and advocacy on international and national top political level. The external evaluation of the women's projects is a good tool for collecting, recording and illustrating important experiences.

The last four issues however is not about external evaluations, but are papers about international and national campaigns for criminalizing of the buying of sexual activities, papers about prostitution and human trafficking, papers about the trend to legalise the sex industry and de-masking the international lobby who try to have sexual violence against women recognised as work. These authors and their organisations have really made a change.

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International co-ordinator

