

Backing for 'Nordic law' on prostitution

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Unison women's conference 2010: Delegates at the Unison women's conference voted overwhelmingly on Saturday to support the decriminalisation of prostitutes and criminalisation of the buyers of sex.

They backed the so-called Nordic model which also includes practical and financial support to give prostitutes the confidence and job skills needed to escape the industry.

The approach has been successfully adopted by Sweden, Norway and Iceland - countries that top the global charts in terms of gender equality.

Conference welcomed government legislation to criminalise the buying of sex acts contained in the Policing and Crime Bill, labelling it an important step towards tackling sex trafficking and prostitution.

The law is due to take effect on April 1.

But delegates argued that the changes did not go far enough.

They stressed the need for tighter legislation before the 2012 London Olympics, highlighting other countries' experiences of spiralling sex trafficking and prostitution during major sports events.

National women's committee speaker Cath Elliot rejected arguments that decriminalising the whole industry and treating prostitution as "any other job" would protect women from violence.

She pointed to international research showing that prostitutes, by enduring a high level of daily sexual activity, sustained long-term physical and psychological injuries similar to victims of torture.

Suffolk police delegate Sally Swift said that the local force had started targeting buyers more rigorously since the murder of five prostitutes in Ipswich in late 2006.

"They now have a much more sympathetic and protective attitude towards prostitutes in the area," she said, reporting that the shift had been successful in deterring curb crawlers.

South East region delegate Jenny Eaton told of the abuse she had suffered as a teenage prostitute.

"If we criminalise pimps and punters, we can minimise demand which will lead to

supply drying up," she argued.

Delegates called on Unison to support the Demand Change! campaign by urging its parliamentary group of MPs to actively lobby for the Nordic model.

Conference also voted to take the Demand Change! motion to Unison's national conference in Bournemouth this summer.

"It's time for our male members to take a stand on this issue," Ms Elliot said.

News story, 01.12.2008

Criminalizing the purchase of sexual activity

In November 2008, the Norwegian Parliament voted for changes in the legislation on prostitution, in effect criminalizing the purchase of sexual activity or a sexual act, by introducing a new section 202a in the General Civil Penal Code:

Section 202a

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.

A separate section applies when the relevant acts are committed against a person under 18 years of age.

Section 202a will enter into force January 1st 2009, and will be applicable also to acts committed abroad by any Norwegian national or any person domiciled in Norway.

Parliament made no changes to existing rules that forbid human trafficking as well as promoting the engagement of other persons in prostitution.