

Press Release – Doras Luimní welcomes government announcement to introduce sex buyer laws.

27th November 2014

Doras Luimní welcome the news that the Government are to introduce sex buyer laws. The Criminal Law (sexual offences) Bill, 2014 has been published today Thursday the 27th of November. Included in this bill is the decriminalisation of the sellers of sex, the criminalisation of the buyers, strengthening of the laws on child grooming, and additional measures to ensure that offences will be easier to prosecute.

Doras Luimní CEO Karen McHugh said: “A milestone has been reached in the efforts to combat human trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced prostitution. This timely piece of legislation will help eliminate some of the barriers facing woman who are trapped in a cycle of exploitation. We know through our direct support work that women in prostitution face a multitude of issues, not least the threat of criminalisation. Under the old legislation, it is neither illegal to buy or sell sex, but the associated activities are criminalised – soliciting, loitering, or living off the earnings of prostitution. These are all offences that disproportionately affect the sellers of sex, who in the vast majority are women. By decriminalising the sellers you immediately increase their chances for successful long term exiting. We have never viewed women in prostitution as the source of the problem; many come from disadvantaged and challenged socio-economic backgrounds. Most engage in prostitution purely as a means of survival; others do so to support their families who are financially dependent on them; and others are trafficked and are forced into prostitution. Nearly all have criminal records. Previous efforts to deal with prostitution have resulted in criminal prosecutions for the women; this is misguided. We will now have legislation on our hands that supports women and criminalises the buyers of sex”.

Ms. McHugh continued: “We also commend the Minister for not lowering the age of consent from 17 to 16 and for increasing the penalties for child grooming; this will ensure that those who are prostituted from an early age cannot be caught in the lie that they consent to prostitution. We know from experience that girls are trafficked into and around Ireland at a young age and are commercially sexually abused until they reach the age of sexual ‘consent’. They then miraculously appear on street corners selling sex for themselves. Their traffickers, or groomers, albeit less visible, are making huge profits from these vulnerable young women over a prolonged period of time”.

On the subject of service provision Anti-trafficking Officer, Patricia Stapleton stated: “We would encourage the Minister to not only strengthen the legislation but also to put into place sufficient service provision for women wishing to exit prostitution. It is our experience that when women wish to leave prostitution, they frequently require intensive support services. While we endeavour to support women in a holistic manner, there are only so many supports that NGO’s can provide; statutory agencies need to step up to the mark and support women,

particularly migrant women, to exit prostitution. Habitual residency condition¹ should be removed as a barrier to service provision. Women need access to housing, they need financial resources, they require access to third level education. This the only way they will exit poverty and ultimately prostitution”.

ENDS

Editor Notes

Doras Luimní is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation based in Limerick. Our mission is to promote and uphold the human rights and wellbeing of migrants through personal advocacy, integration development and collaborative advocacy campaigns at the local and national level.

We have a dedicated Anti-Trafficking Office which participates in local and national campaigns against forced prostitution and sex trafficking. We provide a local street outreach programme, in conjunction with Goshh, for women affected by prostitution in Limerick city.

For more information about our anti-trafficking work, including training and resources, see our website (www.dorasluimni.org) or contact the Doras Luimní Anti-Trafficking Officer (phone 061 310 328 or email p.stapleton@dorasluimni.org). Our submission to the Joint Committee is available online at <http://www.dorasluimni.org/images/publications/dorasluimnisubmissionaug2012.pdf>.

Doras Luimní is an active partner in the Turn off the Red Light (TORL) campaign which seeks to end prostitution and sex trafficking in Ireland. TORL is comprised of a coalition of NGOs, civil society groups, trade unions, political parties advocating legislative change to criminalise the purchase of sex. See the www.turnofftheredlight.ie for more details.

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¹ http://www.flac.ie/download/pdf/habitual_residence_condition_guide_final.pdf