

## **Oireachtas Committee Recommends Swedish Model Advocated by Doras Luimní and Turn Off the Red Light Campaign**

**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

Doras Luimní, the regional leader of the Turn Off the Red Light (TORL) campaign in the Mid-West enthusiastically welcomes the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality to introduce Swedish-style legislation criminalising the purchase of sex in Ireland. The committee endorsed the demand-criminalisation approach advocated by TORL campaigners in its report, *Review of the Legislation on Prostitution in Ireland*, which it published today.

The recommendations vindicate the TORL argument that criminalising demand is the key to moving forward. Chairman David Stanton announced that the Committee had concluded that “a reduction in demand will lessen the incidence of harms associated with prostitution”. This is the case made by the Turn Off the Red Light campaign over the last three years since it was established as an alliance of organisations who had identified the need for legislative change in relation to prostitution. The Committee further agreed with the TORL partners that decriminalising those who sell sex is necessary “to help reduce stigma and barriers to seeking support from the Gardaí and support”.

We are heartened by the consideration of the vulnerability and exploitation of those who are commodified in prostitution and the clear links drawn between prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation. The Committee specifically recognised the “preponderance of migrant women in prostitution in Ireland and acknowledged the significance of demand as “the economic basis for human trafficking into this State for the purpose of sexual exploitation”.

We now ask the Minister for Justice to implement legislation criminalising the purchase of sex as recommended by the Committee and to implement in full the extensive set of legal and policy reforms which they propose. These recommendations include measures that would protect witnesses in cases dealing with sexual exploitation through prostitution or trafficking through providing for anonymous evidence. Consultation with support agencies and with individuals involved in prostitution on how to minimise harm, protect their health and well-being, support exit from prostitution and formulate appropriate and properly resourced policies relating to health, education, training, housing and immigration status, is also urged by the Committee.

We commend the Joint Committee on recognising and advocating strategies to deal with the changed nature of the organisation of prostitution which has become heavily reliant on mobile phones and websites in recent years. To tackle this it is suggested that Gardaí should have increased powers to disable any phone number they have reasonable grounds to suspect is being used for the purposes of prostitution. The report advises increased penalties against those organising, profiting from or facilitating prostitution and trafficking.

Supplementary to the criminalisation of the purchase of sex, a range of measures are proposed in the Committee’s report to deter and prosecute demand-side such as accessing websites advertising prostitution in the State.

It is important to take note of the preventative element whereby the Committee advises that the Government should collaborate with the European Union and other states to address “the economic and social factors that drive and sustain human trafficking and the prostitution of migrant men and women”.

CEO Karen McHugh praised the Joint Committee stating “We wish to publically thank all the members of the Committee and say that we have been really impressed with the manner in

which it carried out its work. It engaged in a very comprehensive consultation process which was inclusive of all the stakeholders and perspectives in the debate. Assessing the evidence and arguments presented in 800 submissions as well as a series of oral hearings with 24 organisations and individuals is a massive task which the Committee undertook in a very professional and conscientious way. All of the views and contributions were listened to and taken on board. We contributed a written submission, attended a conference of stakeholders and presented at an oral hearing held by the Committee and we found them to be very well-informed and respectful. We are extremely pleased that the outcome we sought was arrived at through a consultation process that was so thorough and transparent.”

Anti-Trafficking Officer, Patricia Stapleton observed “The debate on how to legislate for prostitution can be very contentious as there are widely divergent positions and perspectives on what is the most appropriate way of understanding it and creating policy around it. We took up this campaign to bring about legislative change because we saw that exploitation was happening, human rights abuses were taking place, and because of the legal situation a huge international industry was thriving from the misery and degradation of powerless people. All of our work is informed by a human rights approach and based on our work on the ground in Limerick we are keenly aware of the constraints and control which are used to facilitate sexual exploitation of vulnerable women, most of whom are young migrants. If these recommendations are implemented they will go a long way towards reducing the inequality and exploitation which is inherent in prostitution”.

Ms McHugh added: “We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those individuals and organisations who provided invaluable support to us locally. I’m thinking in particular of our colleagues in Adapt Services, the Rape Crisis Centre Mid-West and Paul Partnership who supported our submission as part of the consultation process. We must recognise the key role played by our local councillors on Limerick City Council and Limerick County Council who unanimously endorsed the Turn Off the Red Light last December which was very significant in progressing the campaign at a critical time. We are very appreciative of that strong leadership here in Limerick.”

Following the publication of the report, the next significant event for TORL partners is the regional launch of the *Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution* at the Hunt Museum, Rutland Street, Limerick on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> June at 5pm. The author is award-winning journalist Rachel Moran, who is herself a vocal proponent of the Swedish-style legislation. Ms Moran is also a founder member of the Space International, a coalition of prostitution survivors. Ms Moran and fellow survivors will speak of their first-hand experiences of prostitution and the Irish sex industry. A Question and Answer session will be facilitated by the social justice organisation, The Advocacy Initiative, followed by a wine reception. The event is timely in providing an opportunity for discussion and consideration of the Joint Committee recommendations.

**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 the Red Ribbon Project, 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](http://www.dorasluimni.org)) or contact the Doras Luimní Anti-Trafficking Officer (phone 061 310 328 or email [p.stapleton@dorasluimni.org](mailto: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](http://www.turnofftheredlight.ie) for more details.

The Red Ribbon Project is a charity working in the area of Sexual Health Promotion, HIV and STI Prevention and Support Services in counties Clare, Limerick and Tipperary North. For more information on The Red Ribbon Project see their website on [www.redribbonproject.com](http://www.redribbonproject.com) or contact the office on 061 314354 or email [info@redribbonproject.com](mailto:info@redribbonproject.com)

The Advocacy Initiative is a three-year community and voluntary sector project that promotes understanding, awareness and effectiveness of social justice advocacy in Ireland. The Initiative seeks to strengthen policy responses to existing and emerging challenges in addressing poverty and social exclusion, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society. For more information see <http://www.advocacyinitiative.ie>.

A statement by the Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality is available online at <http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/mediazone/pressreleases/name-17366-en.html>

The Report on Hearings and Submissions on the Review of the Legislation on Prostitution is available in full at

<http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/justice/Report-on-hearings-and-submissions-on-the-Review-of-Legislation-on-Prostitution.pdf>

A witness list and text of written submissions and transcripts of the oral hearings are also available at <http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/justice/Witnesses-and-Submissions-on-Review-of-Legislation-on-Prostitution.pdf> and <http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/justice/Committee-Debates-on-Review-of-Legislation-on-Prostitution.pdf>

#### **Contact Information:**

Karen McHugh, CEO, Doras Luimní, Mount St. Vincent, O'Connell Avenue, Limerick.  
**Telephone:** 061 310 328 **Email:** [k.mchugh@dorasluimni.org](mailto:k.mchugh@dorasluimni.org)

Patricia Stapleton, Anti-Trafficking Officer, Doras Luimní, Mount St. Vincent, O'Connell Avenue, Limerick. **Telephone:** 061 310 328 **Email:** [p.stapleton@dorasluimni.org](mailto:p.stapleton@dorasluimni.org)