



# The Scottish Women's Convention

Response to the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunity Committee Inquiry - to explore the impact and contribution of migrant populations within Scottish Society and the extent and nature of trafficking.

The SWC response relates specifically to questions about human trafficking.

April 2010



## Introduction

The purpose of the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is to communicate and consult with women in Scotland to influence public policy. Through the Convention's policy work, round table and celebratory events the SWC strives to have contact with women and relevant organisations. The SWC aims to provide an effective way of consulting with a diverse range of women in Scotland.

The Scottish Women's Convention has a network of over 300,000 women from relevant organisations throughout Scotland.

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**This paper provides a response by the Scottish Women's Convention to the Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee inquiry to: explore the impact and contribution of migrant populations within Scottish Society and the extent and nature of trafficking.**

The response from the SWC refers only to the following key questions asked –

- What is the scale of the trafficking issue, in terms of the number of people involved and the geographical areas which people tend to be sourced from?
- What is the nature of the problem? Are people trafficked primarily for reasons related to sexual exploitation or with regard to false labour?
- Given the degree of criminality that tends to be involved in human trafficking what problems does this present for public sector agencies seeking to assist the victims of this activity?

## SWC Submission

As the SWC are totally committed to condemning all violence and exploitation of women and children we welcome the undertaking of this enquiry by the Equal Opportunities Committee and in particular the key questions on the issue of trafficking in Scotland. Recent reports point to this being a rapidly expanding exploitative trade and the SWC call on the Scottish Government to provide strong leadership on the issue of trafficking.

In May of 2009 the SWC held a conference in Glasgow on the issue of Human Trafficking where 110 delegates were addressed by speakers who included Johann Lamont, MSP; Jack Dromey, Deputy General Secretary of Unite the Union; Ann Hamilton, TARA; Detective Superintendent Michael Orr, Chair of the Scottish Human Trafficking Group; Margaret Hazell, MBE; Helen Atkins, Poppy Project and Jan MacLeod, Women's Support Project.

Their knowledge encompassed a wide range of understanding about trafficking issues and the conference audience was very responsive to the invitation to ask questions of the speakers. Concern about human trafficking taking place in Scotland was evident.

The overwhelming majority of women that the SWC have consulted say that published statistics on trafficking in Scotland are at best conservative in their estimations and are critically underestimating the real extent that criminal organisations and individual traders are coercing, exploiting and abusing the human rights of individuals.

There was strong support for the view that a lack of convictions for trafficking offences belies the increasing level of activity taking place in Scotland, particularly in the scale of sex trafficking. They believe trauma and fear of retribution both here and in their country of origin prevents many victims from disclosing they have been trafficked therefore securing convictions is complex and supporting statistical evidence difficult to substantiate. It was agreed that Scottish and UK Governments must coordinate their response to these criminal activities in order to successfully combat this forced labour and exploitation.

The SWC believe victims should be provided with asylum for at least 3 months and given possibilities for permanent asylum for humanitarian reasons if needed. Many victims face violent reprisals, threats or even death if returned home therefore help should continue on repatriation through improving international organisational links and cooperation.

Women referred to comments in the media that competing priorities within police forces and gaps in intelligence gathering have limited resources available to target this crime. Women would clearly welcome long term initiatives that bring together the public, voluntary and law enforcement sectors to improve the prosecution of the criminals behind trafficking and the provision of maximum protection for victims. The SWC believe the Scottish Government must ensure there is the financial means available to enhance investigations and convict perpetrators within this crime network.

There was considerable agreement that widespread internet advertising and the growing availability of "sex encounter" venues e.g. lap dancing clubs and saunas made supply and demand profitable for traffickers.

Participants at SWC events cannot identify where many of these women trafficked into prostitution originate from but they pointed to the fact that adverts throughout Scotland suggest that women of numerous ethnic origins can be purchased for sex.

Basically taking paid for sexual encounters "indoors" under the guise of "adult entertainment" was protecting men who seek these services and allowing those who run trafficking rings to operate under the cover of legitimate businesses or through rented flats where women are basically imprisoned.

The SWC believe that policymakers must confront the fact that women are trafficked into prostitution because of the demand created by men. To tackle the problem of growing demand, criminalising the purchaser of sex should be legislated for. Whilst the demand remains unchallenged the exploitative nature of this degrading and criminal trade will not be eradicated.

Women who have engaged with the SWC fully recognised that trafficking for forced labour and servitude takes many forms, as well as women and girls forced into prostitution, many are trapped by debt bondage in domestic labour, sweatshops or as agricultural workers. Too often kept there by clearly illegal tactics and paid little or nothing.

Feedback confirmed that the majority of women attending our events believed trafficking was not confined to major towns in Scotland but was carried out in numerous smaller communities, particularly in domestic servitude and agricultural work. The unwillingness of victims to come forward obviously hinders authorities identifying perpetrators. The opening up of EU borders has also allowed greater movement of people who can now enter the UK legally and this has arguably made moving people easier by persuasion or duplicity basically enticing victims through promises of legitimate work and high salaries which are non-existent.

The SWC believes that widespread, ongoing informative campaigns and awareness raising about the trafficking problem in Scotland will result in greater exposure of those who traffic in human cargo. Expansion and strengthening of the Gangmasters (Licencing) Act 2004 to include construction workers should be considered urgently particularly with the additional construction work the Olympic Games in London and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow will create.

The UK has signed and ratified the UN's Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (the 'Palermo Protocol'), this supplements the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime 2000. The UK has also signed and ratified the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Beings. It is imperative vigorous adherence to these conventions drives the Scottish and UK work against trafficking.

Women clearly welcomed the establishment of the UK Human Trafficking Centre in 2006 and the Pentameter operations<sup>1</sup> as positive actions and also commended the work of organisations such as the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA) in Glasgow.

The SWC believe expansion of the services provided by this organisation should be made a funding priority of the Scottish Government to ensure trafficking victims are not turned away through a lack of available resources.

April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010

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<sup>1</sup> Coordinated campaign of activity aimed at disrupting those who engage in trafficking for sexual exploitation throughout the UK, involving all UK police forces, other law enforcement agencies, the UK Human Trafficking Centre in 2006 and 2008 <http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/police-probe-trafficking.html>



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All SWC reports and consultation responses can be accessed on our website  
<http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/what-we-do.asp>



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