

AFRO e-Newsletter (May 2009)

1. WORK REPORT

1.1 Sex workers outreach training workshops in Macau

AFRO was invited by the Commission for HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control in Macau to launch a series of training workshops for outreach volunteers there. About 40 volunteers joined the 4-session training held in April and May 2009. Due to limited human resources, we were forced to invite only 20 (out of 40) participants to join the outreach practicum (2 sessions).

We paid outreach visits to sex workers working on the streets, in small hotels, one-woman apartments and brothels. There are both similarities and differences between their working condition and the one of those working in Hong Kong. We were able to review and recapture a lot about initiating outreach visits to new establishments and share it with the volunteers.

The training has come to an end. We hope that the volunteers in Macau can soon start outreaching sex workers and provide them with more support.

1.2 The 1st Anniversary of the AFRO Shop

To celebrate its first anniversary, the AFRO shop has introduced a promotion and got a satisfactory response. The trainees of the AFRO Shop, who at the beginning had no idea about retailing business at all, have gradually acquired certain sales skills through their on-job training last year. Needless to say, it is a bitter-sweet experience.

The AFROS shop is only a small business and is facing huge pressure from the competitive market. Fortunately, some sex workers and establishments have been very supportive and have become our regular customers. Although there has not been a significant breakthrough in business performance for the past few months, we would still stick to our principle and continue to try our best to provide products, in good quality and at good price, to sex workers.

1.3 May 1 Rally

May 1 International Labour Day is an International celebration which workers gather together to fight for workers' right and interest, plus the promotion of the social movement.

This year, AFRO has joined the May Day rally organised by the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions at the Victoria Park, with slogan “Resist to Economic Tsunami, anti-exploitation, support to the means of livelihood”. Apart from workers from the workers’ unions, there were more from the religious, women, youth, community, migrant workers and student groups, which made it 3, 500 participants in total, who raised their concerns and demand for more protection and security policies from the government under current severe economic circumstances.

We believe that sex work is work. Just like any other workers, sex workers’ earnings are greatly affected by both inner and outer environment. At the same time, the current legal framework has turned sex workers into a dangerous environment, in which violence, robbery and refuse of payment by clients is nothing new. As a result, we demand the immediate decriminalisation of sex work, and protection for sex workers same as all other workers and self-employed persons.



1.4 A Talk by Crime Prevention Bureau of the Police

You may still remember that a number of sex workers have been murdered since last April. Some of these cases may be over, but it does not imply that our job is done. From May last year, we have had regular meetings with Crime Prevention Bureau of the Police and tried to facilitate its communication with the sex industry. On 20 May, 4 representatives from Crime

Prevention Bureau came to AFRO's centre and gave us a talk on sex work related laws, proper procedures for law enforcement, rights of arrested persons etc. About 30 persons attended the event, including more than 10 sex workers, some of our volunteers and our staff team.

We hope that the presentation by the police can help enhance sex workers' understanding on proper procedures for law enforcement and the rights that they have when dealing with the police, so that they will no longer tolerate any police abuse in the future.

2) AFRO's NEWS READING

Salvos apologise to sex workers over ads

ABC News

Posted Fri May 22, 2009 9:42am AEST

Updated Fri May 22, 2009 10:27am AEST

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/05/22/2577913.htm>

Salvation Army advert featuring the story of a prostitute. Sex workers were offended by the ad and demanded an apology. (newspaper)

The Salvation Army has issued an apology to sex workers for its newspaper advertisement featuring the story of a prostitute that the charity helped.

A row broke out after the Australian Sex Workers' Association, the Scarlet Alliance, claimed the charity was capitalising on prostitution in its latest campaign.

The Red Shield Appeal advertisement details the story of 'Rick', a prostitute who left a message on a computer screen inside the Salvation Army's Oasis van.

"Disguised as a client, we picked him up, took him to the airport and flew him interstate to one of our rehab centres, miles away from the heroin and hustling," it says.

It says that months later, Rick is living a new life.

Scarlet Alliance President, Elena Jeffreys, said her organisation received many calls from upset sex workers who had seen the ad.

"(We) are angry that the Salvation Army is capitalising on discrimination against sex workers, when sex work is not their core work," she said.

The Salvation Army, which is preparing to doorknock for its annual Red Shield Appeal this weekend, says the story featured in the ad is genuine, but is sorry for any offence it may have caused.

Major Phillip Maxwell says the advertisement will now be pulled.

"The potential was that it could seriously damage the relationship that we have in providing services," he said.

"Our priority is to look after the needs of people and we gain nothing if we marginalise or distance ourselves from the very people we desire to serve."

Sex workers had been planning to protest at the Appeal's launch, unless the charity said sorry.

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