

## **AFRO e-Newsletter (March 2010)**

### **1 SEX INDUSTRY BIZ NEWS**

#### 1.1 The 2nd Anniversary of the Murders of Sex Workers

During the period between March 2008 and early 2009, 9 sex workers were murdered. And the two cases happened in Tsuen Wan are still unsolved. However, the government's and the society's concern over sex workers' safety is already fading. During the 2nd anniversary of the murder cases, AFRO launches a campaign, to remind sex workers to unite and resist violence together, and to encourage their customers to be good and responsible and use no violence against sex workers. We also call on the police to make all efforts to investigate the cases and bring the murderer or murderers to justice, and the government to initiate reviews of existing laws, study and prepare for decriminalization of sex work.

AFRO's statement in Chinese

<http://www.afro.org.hk/pdf/press/p20100319.pdf>

#### 1.2 Response from the Fire Services Department and the Buildings Department

The collapse of a building on Ma Tau Wai Road on Jan 29 killed at least one sex worker. As a lot of sex workers are working in those small split rooms (with independent bathrooms and kitchens), AFRO is deeply concerned about the safety issues. We have sent enquiries to the Fire Services Department and the Buildings Department and required advice on fire and structural safety.

Summary of the reply from the Fire Services Department is as follows (originally in Chinese, AFRO's translation):

1. An illegal structure may jeopardize fire and structural safety. When considering renting a small split room, a person may apply for the floor plan of the building from the Buildings Department, so as to make sure that the new structure is approved and legal.
2. Cracks in walls, concrete spalling, or an unusual sound may be a sign of the collapse of a building. All people inside the building should leave immediately and call 999.
3. The Fire Services Department does not require residents in residential apartments, including small split rooms, to install fire safety equipments. Residents can purchase for themselves.

General enquiries or complaints: 2723 8787.

The reply from the Buildings Department highlights that:

All unauthorised building works are illegal. Action will be taken by the Department when a threat is detected.

Enquiries or complaints: 2626 1626.

### **2 WORK REPORT**

#### 2.1 Regular Meeting between Sex Workers Support Groups and the Crime Prevention Bureau of the Police

A meeting was held on 22 March between 3 sex workers support groups (including AFRO) and the Crime Prevention Bureau of the Police. At the meeting, the groups raised a few issues which were commonly faced.

#### Contact numbers of regional police divisions

In 2008, due to the serial murders of sex workers, the police disseminated contact numbers of their special duty squads in different regions among sex workers, to facilitate non-urgent communication. However, the duty hours of the special duty squads in different regions vary and may not match the working hours of sex workers. It happened more than once that when a sex worker called, the police officer who was supposed to answer the call was already off duty.

The Crime Prevention Bureau indicated that as no more murder of sex workers had happened since early 2009, the special duty squads might have shifted their focus. They emphasised that the contact numbers were supposed to be for non-urgent communication only. In case of emergency, sex workers should call 999 for help.

#### Police impersonation

A poster was produced by the Crime Prevention Bureau on how to identify a police officer and a police impersonator. AFRO has been helping with the distribution and heard from sex workers that police impersonation is still common in various districts. The issue was raised at the meeting. The police emphasised that sex workers could ask a person who claims to be a police officer to produce his/her warrant card and contact the nearest police station immediately for clarification. They also advised sex workers to install door safety chains on the doors, improve the lighting outside their workplaces, and be cautioned when answering door.

#### Secretly snapped pictures

Recently it has been found that more and more customers secretly snap pictures of sex workers with mobile phones or other devices. The police indicated that presently this behaviour is not regulated. If a person takes a picture of a sex worker and publicise it without his/her consent, he/she may offend the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance and the sex worker may consider filing a civil complaint. That person may also be charged with publication of obscene articles. The police advised sex workers to reserve a certain area for customers to place their personal belongings so as to minimise the possibility of being taken a picture secretly.

The police also explained the proper procedure of taking cautioned statements from a person below 18. The interview should be carried out in the presence of a parent or a guardian. And they urged sex workers in one-woman apartments to provide their contact numbers so that the police can send crime alert messages to their mobile phones.

## 2.2 AFRO Clinic

We would like to share with you some very good news! The AIDS Trust Fund has approved new grant to support the clinic and research project, with which AFRO works with the School of Public Health of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. From April on, our clinic will again be open 2 sessions a week (every Tuesday and Thursday afternoons).

## 2.3 2010 Daytime Volunteer Training

We rely heavily on volunteers to share the outreach workload. In January, we launched another round of volunteer recruitment and 9 persons joined our training. Most of the participants are from local colleges and universities. They are required to attend all 5 lessons (on theory) in March and finish their practicum (at least 2 sessions) in April. We look forward to having more new members joining us!

## 2.4 AFRO Club

AFRO Club was officially set up on 8 March 2010. Up to now more than 10 sex workers have joined the Club. At this moment we only recruit members among visitors to our Drop-in Centre. After reviewing the procedure, we will launch a recruitment campaign during outreach visits.

# 3 COMING EVENTS

## 3.1 Hong Kong Wetland Park Day Trip

Spring is coming! It's time to have a relaxing weekend with your children. Join us by calling 2770 1002!!

Date: 2 May 2010 (Sunday)

Time: 8:45am – 2:30pm

Venue: Hong Kong Wetland Park

Fee: \$10/person (Including transportation fee and snacks. You can buy your own lunch at the park.)

### 3.2 Chocolate Making Class

AFRO has invited a volunteer to teach us about making some simple chocolate and chocolate truffle for your beloved ones! The class consists of two sessions and has limited places. Call us at 2770 1002 ASAP and pay the fee within 3 days to secure your place!

Date: 26 April 2010 and 10 May 2010 (Monday)

Time: 10:30am – 12:30pm

Venue: AFRO Drop-in Centre

Fee: \$50/person (Including materials)

## 4 AFRO's NEWS READING

[http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gptNqAnEhpro9MdhvY\\_1B\\_MIF5gD9EL9DN80](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gptNqAnEhpro9MdhvY_1B_MIF5gD9EL9DN80)

### **French sex workers protest legal brothels**

By KATIE KING (AP)

25 March 2010

*PARIS — Dozens of French sex workers proclaiming themselves proud to be prostitutes marched Wednesday to protest a lawmaker's proposal to legalize brothels in France, arguing that such a law would deny them the freedom to work on their own.*

*A lawmaker in France's governing party has proposed reopening brothels just over six decades after they were banned in order to move prostitutes off the streets and provide them with medical, financial and legal protection.*

*The protesters say the proposal limits their options to make their own decisions — and are demanding, instead, a repeal of a 2003 law that outlaws solicitation.*

*"We are workers and we want the choice to work as we want," said Thierry Schaffauser, 27, a sex worker from Paris now living in London. "For doctors, they can work for a company or they can be independent. I think the importance is to let people choose how they want to work."*

*Dozens participated in a daylong conference on prostitution at the Senate, organized by a lawmaker opposed to the proposed bill. Lawmaker Chantal Brunel, who proposed the law, was not present.*

*After the conference, the men and women marched through Paris' Left Bank, many dressed in their skimpy work attire. Some carried signs reading, "You sleep with us, you vote against us." "There's nothing to be ashamed of," said Lola Bruna, a 19-year-old sex worker from Paris. They "used to say that this is the oldest job ever, and that's not for no reason."*

*Brothels were legally outlawed in France in 1946. The 2003 law tightened restrictions against prostitution by making solicitation punishable with two months in prison and a euro3,750 (\$5,000) fine.*

*"The question is not, for example, about the brothels," said Alima Boumediene-Thiery, the Green Party senator who organized Wednesday's conference. "The question is about the recognition of the rights of these men and women who have made these choices that we must respect."*

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Comment:

Successful legal reform requires wide consultation, especially with the affected group. As we can see from the march in Paris, legalisation of brothels cannot solve the problems that sex workers endure every day. Instead, the government should listen to sex worker's voice. Apart from financial and legal rights, the right to choose their way of work is also important to sex workers.

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