

Personal Safety of Sex Workers

In March 2008, 4 one-woman-apartment sex workers, located at Yuen Long, Tai Po and North Point, were killed. That made everyone scared to the point that some women decided to take several day-off to avoid the tragedy. People know that these sex workers work alone and dare not report to police, that is why it is not uncommon for us to hear about the story of cash / mobiles being stolen, and even violence. They can never be sure if the visitor is a customer or if he is a thief. Despite the fact that someone heartlessly argue that they have an option to stop working in order to secure their personal safety, what could they do for a living then?

With all these reasons, women should stand up and unite themselves

1) Join our “wing chun” self-defense class

2) Work closely with the women next door

A lot of women working at one woman apartments have 24-hour monitor TV, they can help monitor each other's customers. Since service time should be within 45-min to 1 hour. When customer go inside and stay longer than the usual time, the women next door would use their “secret code” or other ways to notify others.

3) Installation of Safety Alarm

In April, AFRO had meetings with the representatives from Senior Citizen Home Safety Association twice for the installation arrangement of safety alarms in one-woman-apartments. From now on, sex workers can install the alarm through AFRO and it only costs \$100 per month. AFRO spreads out the news through outreach and the feedback is positive so far. However, the installation of this safety alarms requires the support of land phone line network. Thus, those who do not have it may have problem to receive this service. Due to this reason, we have contacted another company providing the same service through mobile phone network.

4) Report to the police

For the good of the women, the best way is to report to the police and bring the criminals to justice

News about Sex Workers

Investigation of the Landlords

We have recently received several complaints from the one-woman-apartment sex workers that the police came in and demanded for the personal details of their apartment owners. Although this is the beginning of the story, it certainly reveals that the police tries to press the pressure on the landlords or/and real estate agencies so as to force the sex workers to move out of the buildings. What's even worse is when sex worker were reluctant to provide those information, they would be harassed under the so-called investigation.

According to the law, it is not illegal for a Hong Kong Resident, whose condition of stay is not restricted and aged 16 or above, to work as a sex worker. Therefore, those who work in one-women-apartments is not a criminal. However , it is illegal for a person to rent out a premise for another for sex work. And it makes the sex workers and the landlords so confused! AFRO demands the government to review the following legal provisions:

[Cap 200 s 143 Letting premises for use as a vice establishment](#)

[Cap 200 s 144 Tenant etc. permitting premises or vessel to be kept as a vice establishment](#)

[Cap 200 s 145 Tenant etc. permitting premises or vessel to be used for prostitution](#)

Advocacy

To advocate for decriminalisation of “two-sex worker apartment” so that two sex workers can work together with mutual help and protection (which implies the amendment of the legal definition of the term “vice establishment”), and omission of the legal article “Soliciting for an Immoral Purpose”, we have been working on:

1) **On-line petition**

We have initiated an on-line petition. About 500 persons have signed, including 100 sex workers. We would submit the petition to the Chief Executive, all Legislative Councillors and heads of the relevant government bureaus and departments.

2) **Lobbying**

April – had meeting with Legislative Councilor Emily Lau Wai Hing (The Frontier), Fernando CHEUNG Chiu Hung (Civic Party), Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk- yee and Tommy CHEUNG Yu Yan (Liberal Party), to explain to them our point of view on the legal reform of sex work.

23 April – attended a meeting of the workgroup of District Council of Yau Ma Tei, Tsim Sha Tsui and Mong Kok which works on issues about the sex industry in the District. At the meeting we raised the problems faced by sex workers and proposed to the workgroup to organise regular meetings with sex workers, support groups and the police, so as to facilitate joint effort in promoting social harmony in the community.

24 April – met the Complaints Division of the LegCo and filed complaints against the police's unfair and unreasonable acts towards sex workers during law enforcement, and their attempting to force sex workers to disclose information of their landlords which usually leads to forced relocation of sex workers. Those who attended the meeting include Emily LAU Wai Hing, Alan Leong Kah Kit (Civil Party), Albert HO Chun Yan and James TO Kun Sun (Democratic Party). After listening to what raised by AFRO and the sex worker who attended that meeting, the Legislative Councillors expressed that they were inclined to proposing to the Government to initiate a study on laws and measures related to the sex industry in overseas countries.

5 May — attended the meeting of the Panel on Security of the LegCo. Besides issue on personal safety of sex workers, we also raised the issues on police abuse and legal reforms. The panel chair agreed to follow up with the discussion over the legal reform of sex work.

AFRO's Clinic

After operated for 8 months, sex workers' response towards this free medical inspection service was quite good. An average of 60 sex workers attended to this free service each month from January to April 2008. Among them, majority were local sex workers (45%), then Filipino (31%), Thai (17%) and PRC (7%).

The figure reflected that sex workers are very concerned about their own health. In view of the increasing demand, the outreach clinic service had already been increased. As for Centre's clinic service, we may consider increasing the consultation session from 2 to 3 afternoon every week after further discussion.

Walk-A-Thon

Our fund raising walkathon was successfully held on 6th April 2008 morning. Our theme this year is "Walk in excellence, forwarding the best at our 15th anniversary" with the aim to celebrate our anniversary. Colleagues, women, ex-co members and the volunteers as well as the public joined this event. Not only did it show their sense of belongings but it also signified the notion of being together without labels. Once again, we thank everyone the support and donation!

AFRO's Small Business

With the support from Oxfam Hong Kong, we have started a small business as a training platform for women who look for alternatives for their livelihoods.

Thanks to Aiko our volunteer trainer, participants of the project have gained basic understanding on small business operation. Now they are fully engaged in this small business selling condoms and lubricants (at very good price of course) to the fellow-workers.

EXTRA OUTREACH

Extra outreach visits were paid to one-woman apartments during Easter holiday. We delivered messages about measures to be taken for personal safety and mutual help. And we also promoted the "Wing Chun" self-defense class and the safety alarms.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

In April, we organised an extra volunteer training. 18 persons joined and were qualified to officially join as our outreach volunteers.

AFRO's News Reading

U.S. university students visiting brothels

Ming Pao, 13 April 2008 (Sunday) (in Chinese)

<http://hk.news.yahoo.com/080413/12/2s9lj.html>

AFRO is in frequent contacts with students from different universities in Hong Kong. We fully understand that discrimination and indifference are based on a lack of knowing and understanding. Sex workers are in fact living right within our community. We realise that education is a way to eliminate discrimination. But when will universities in Hong Kong have the same courage to initiate discussion over various issues on sexuality?

Real estate agent “degraded” as “agent for brothels”

Sing Tao, 3 April 2008 (Thursday) (in Chinese)

<http://hk.news.yahoo.com/080402/60/2rqfa.html>

Over the past two months, AFRO has received a number of phone calls from sex workers from “one-woman apartments” and realized that the police officers had been frequent visiting their work places and asked for information about their landlords. The landlords could have been pressured and thus forced to ask the sex workers to move out. It is in fact not illegal for a person to work in a single premise as a sex worker. However, the way how the police enact the law and collect “evidence” apparently squeezes space for sex workers’ survival.

Online Platform

We have made use of the online platform and created our own blog and e-group.

Please visit: <http://hk.myblog.yahoo.com/actionforreachout> (in Chinese)

As for the e-group, we would deliver messages in both Chinese and English. Email us (afro@afro.org.hk) if you want to join.