

SEX WORKER RIGHTS GROUPS CONDEMN THE RAIDS ON MASSAGE PARLOURS THAT LED TO THE DEPORTATION OF ELEVEN WOMEN

May 11, 2015 – The threat of deportation in human trafficking investigations increases women’s vulnerability to violence and limits their ability to come forward as victims, say sex workers’ rights groups.

On Friday, May 8th 2015, the Ottawa Police Service announced that 11 women will be deported after a human trafficking investigation into commercial massage parlours and body rub facilities. No criminal charges were laid but police said the border services investigation continues, which could spark more deportations.

“The threat of deportation makes it extremely difficult for migrant sex workers to come forward as victims or witnesses of a crime,” says Jean McDonald, Executive Director of Maggie’s – Toronto Sex Workers Action Project. “People swept up in human trafficking investigations should receive immediate immunity from deportation and the opportunity to apply for permanent residency.”

Elene Lam of Butterfly, an Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network, stated, “Migrant sex workers are often the target of robbery and assault. They are afraid to report to police or seek help because they do not want to be deported. Investigations under the guise of trafficking and police raids make the situation even worse. It makes people hide further underground, makes them more vulnerable to violence and endangers their safety.”

These raids come shortly after the enacting of the new sex work laws, the Protection of Community and Exploited Persons Act.

“To push through Canada’s new prostitution laws, the Government conflated consensual sex work and human trafficking. We are working together to demand meaningful protection for sex workers and migrants in the form of legal rights and labour protections,” says Emily Symons of POWER.

The raids that transpired in Ottawa clearly demonstrate how the new laws increase the isolation and exclusion of all sex workers, and have additional negative impact on racialized and migrant sex workers, affecting their health, equity, dignity, safety and human rights, due to the threat of detention and deportation.



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