

# Recommendations from the European Conference on Sex Work, Human Rights, Labour and Migration, Brussels (2005)

The following summary of recommendations was formulated by sex workers and their allies at the European Conference on Sex Work, Human Rights, Labour and Migration held in Brussels, October 15-17, 2005. These recommendations—endorsed by the approximately 200 delegates (sex workers and allies) from 28 European countries—relate to state policies, human rights, labour rights, migration/trafficking and violence. They were presented to the European Parliament on October 17, 2005, at the invitation of Monica Frassoni, Italian Member of European Parliament (Greens/European Free Alliance).

## Background

In response to increasingly repressive legislation, policies and practices across Europe, a small group of sex workers and sex workers' allies in The Netherlands got together in 2002 to organise a conference that would give sex workers a voice. To start, they put out a call inviting sex workers, sex-work projects and sex-worker-rights activists across Europe to join them. An Organising Committee (OC) was formed (composed mainly of sex workers) which then established a legally constituted organisation—the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe—to raise funds for, and host, the conference.

The OC decided that not only should this conference lend sex workers a voice, but it should also produce tools needed to defend our rights throughout Europe, and create alliances with human rights, labour and migrants' organisations.

The European Conference on Sex Work, Human Rights, Labour and Migration was held in Brussels, Belgium, October 15-17, 2005. During the conference, workshops were organised for sex workers and allies to share experiences, knowledge and expertise, so that the realities of the situations for sex workers across Europe could be analysed. These recommendations are the product of these workshops.

## Prostitution Policies

Policies that aim to make sex work invisible and that exclude sex workers from public places serve to amplify the stigma associated with sex work, the social exclusion of sex workers, and their vulnerabilities.

We reject the double standard that only allows prostitution when it is hidden. All laws and measures that undermine the dignity and self-determination of sex workers must be abolished. Sex workers have the right to represent themselves. They should take part in any debate on laws, policies and measures that affect their lives. Sex workers' efforts to organise themselves should be supported.

## Sex Workers' Rights ARE Human Rights

Governments should protect the basic human and civil rights of every sex worker, regardless of gender or national origin. These are common and accepted rights that apply to every citizen and that governments have already agreed to protect—yet sex workers are still denied these rights.

## Sex Work IS Work

Sex workers are workers, and must be recognised as such.

...continued on p. 86. ↪

**Now onward into Brussels' red light district.**

PHOTO: Quentin Deltour (Espace P)



## Prostitutes, WE Salute YOU!

**H**otel conference rooms used for the workshops and plenaries were renamed to commemorate some of history's more (in)famous sex workers who stood up for our rights and influenced society.

### La Malinche (c.1505 - 1529)

La Malinche, known also as Doña Marina, was born into a noble family in Paynalla (Veracruz region, southern Mexico). Her mother sold her into slavery after her father died, and declared her dead, to cheat her out of her inheritance. Once the property of the Chief of Tabasco



she learned to speak Maya. Given to Hernán Cortés along with 19 other slaves, gold, clothes and food, she was baptised in March 1519. Able to interpret in Nahuatl and Maya, she then learned Spanish and soon became Cortés's secretary, and then his mistress, bearing him a son. As interpreter she actively encouraged negotiations over bloodshed. Some consider her a traitor, but many Chicana women identify with this potent historical figure—the outcast who became the Mother of the Mexican Nation.

MURAL: *Cortés y la Malinche* (1926), José Orozco

### Phryné (c.350 BC)

Born at Thespieae in Boeotia, with the name Mnesarete, this famous Athenian courtesan was called “Phryné” (toad), because of her sallow complexion. Her extraordinary beauty earned her so much wealth that she offered to rebuild the walls of Thebes, which had been destroyed by Alexander the Great (336 BC), on condition that the words “*Destroyed by Alexander, restored by Phryné the courtesan,*” were inscribed upon them. She once even avoided a criminal conviction by revealing her flawless breasts to the court—because physical beauty was seen as a mark of divine favour. She was also said to have been the model for Praxiteles's statue of the Cnidian Aphrodite.

OIL ON CANVAS: *Phryné before the Areopagus* (1861), Jean-Léon Gérôme



SEX WORKERS' RIGHTS

↳ continued from p. 85...

Governments should protect sex workers' labour rights just as they do the rights of other workers. In particular, sex workers have the right to social security, health care and minimum wages.

Sex workers—including migrant workers—should be legally allowed to work.

Governments should ensure safe and healthy working conditions for sex workers, similar to those enjoyed by other workers. Mandatory medical checks and police registration—which apply only to sex workers—as well as other discriminatory measures, should be abolished.

## Migrants' Rights ARE Human Rights

The EU should conduct a human rights impact assessment in all anti-trafficking and migration policies and programmes in order to protect and promote the rights of migrant sex workers and trafficked persons.

The European Union should protect the human rights of migrant sex workers and trafficked persons, and in particular their right to legal remedies and to effective access to justice. To this end, it should provide them with appropriate residency permits.

Migrant sex workers and trafficked persons, regardless of their immigration status, should have access to support services, including housing, education, vocational training, psycho-social counselling and legal assistance.

## Violence Against Sex Workers

Sex workers must have the right to unite; to work together, and to protect themselves from violence. Laws that prohibit sex workers from working together should be abolished.

When faced with violence, sex workers should have the right to receive support and protection, regardless of their immigration status. □

♥ This English version of the Recommendations from the European Conference on Sex Work, Human Rights, Labour and Migration, Brussels (2005) has been edited for clarity. The unedited version is available on the ICRSE website at: <http://www.sexworkeurope.org>

