

group. The decision to include the woman's experience as a criterion only affects Guatemalan women at the moment, but it opens the door for the cases of people from other countries.

—Ms.



LEGAL EXPERTS OPPOSE BILL C-36

More than 220 legal experts said in an open letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper that they oppose many elements of his government's new prostitution bill, Bill C-36.

The letter's signatories, experts in constitutional, criminal and public law, do not believe Bill C-36, the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, will make conditions for sex workers safer. More significantly, they believe the bill may violate sex workers' charter rights and put them at risk for greater violence.

Justice Minister Peter MacKay introduced the draft new bill after the Supreme Court struck down Canada's prostitution laws in December 2013 as a violation of sex workers' right to security of the person. Ottawa has until December 31, 2014, to come up with a new plan.

The federal government says its new legislation cracks down on johns and pimps, not prostitutes. The provisions are also meant to protect sex workers from exploitation.

The legal experts' letter says, "Targeting clients will displace sex workers to isolated areas where prospective customers are less likely to be detected by police." They say the bill would prevent sex workers from working in a "safe, indoor space" because clients will fear being arrested.

Public hearings on the bill were completed in the summer.

WOMEN REFUTE DISABILITY ARGUMENTS FOR SEX TRADE

The DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN) Canada says it wants an end to arguments in favour of legalized prostitution that rely on myths about people with disabilities

In July, as the debate on Bill C-36 continued on Parliament Hill, DAWN issued a statement to challenge the widespread belief about the role sex workers play in "ensuring that people with disabilities (particularly men) have access to paid sex with sex workers who are trained to work with people with disabilities."

"There is no data to support this as a reason for the legalization of prostitution," said Bonnie Brayton, national executive director of DAWN Canada. "First of all, it is an ableist argument, and secondly, it re-enforces a sexist notion of male dominance, that men should have the sexual right to access the female body."

Fran Odette, co-author of *The Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability*, added, "the pre-occupation with people with disabilities as recipients of paid sex disregards the reality that millions of Canadian women and men with disabilities engage in healthy, normal sexual activity every day."

DAWN Canada is also concerned that people with disabilities are at risk of exploitation both along with and as sex workers. People with disabilities may experience exploitation by those who purchase sex or by those who exploit sex workers.

Odette acknowledges that there are sex workers who are committed to providing services to people with disabilities with fairness and with dignity. DAWN Canada supports legislation that would place sex workers in control of "both their physical and moral person, and reduce the risk of harm or violence in carrying out their work and would criminalize anyone who seeks to harm or exploit them."

According to the United Nations, there are more than half a billion women with disabilities globally. They consistently make up the lowest-income group in any nation, developing or developed. Additionally, women with disabilities are known to suffer the highest rates of sexual violence. There is no existing research on the number of women with disabilities who engage in sex work in Canada or elsewhere. ❖