

Your  
**Freedom  
of Choice**



**SEX WORK  
REPRESSION KILLS**

**The world is in agreement, at least in the fight against prostitution.** A glut of bans and repressive measures are being implemented, and they are multiplying. Raids and arrests have increased in London in the run-up to the Olympic Games. In certain districts of Hamburg, men risk fines if they approach sex workers. State prosecutors in Athens recently released photos of HIV-positive sex workers on the internet – an act of deliberate public shaming.

**Such measures cause HIV infections and drastically increase the threat of death and injury** – although they are ostensibly meant to protect women from sexual exploitation and to stop the spread of HIV. Street prostitution moves elsewhere. Once they are away from well-known areas, sex workers have difficulty finding help in an emergency.

- Bans reduce income, putting women under pressure. Many are then more likely to agree to unprotected sex.
- Brothel owners can demand exorbitant rents, because sex workers are left with virtually no alternatives.
- If sex workers continue to work secretly, they are almost impossible to reach for HIV prevention workers. Repression also makes them suspicious of offers of help or advice.

**Here's one example from Germany:** Dortmund's street prostitutes used to have ideal working conditions – car stalls especially constructed for the sexworkers' safety, fitted with alarm buttons, and with counseling and help nearby. But then they were banned from the city center. Soon afterwards, a customer stabbed a sex worker in a private flat and threw her from a window. She barely survived her injuries.

**Instead of bans and repressive measures, sex workers need support** – such as rooms where they can retreat to and find health tips, medical aid and condoms. Together with self-help organizations of sexworkers, Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe develops an educational program for women working in brothels to empower them. In this project, we also cooperate with the women themselves, because they know better than anyone what they need. For example, sex workers get the chance to practice asserting themselves and insist on using a condom.

**Good prevention gives sex workers the confidence to choose how they want to work**, helping them protect themselves and others. Those who believe that prostitution can simply be banned are chasing an illusion.

**It is both a scandal and a fatal signal that sex workers are not allowed to enter the United States to participate in the International AIDS Conference. Freedom of choice for sex workers! Now!**