



Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 19th 2012

**ALLOWING MEN TO BUY AND PROFIT FROM THE BODIES OF WOMEN IN PROSTITUTION
IS NOT IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST**

VANCOUVER – Today, January 19th, 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada will hear arguments in *The Attorney General of Canada v. Downtown Eastside Sex Workers United Against Violence Society and Sheryl Kiselbach*. The issue is whether the Downtown Eastside Sex Workers United Against Violence Society should be granted “public interest” standing to argue that Canada’s prostitution laws are unconstitutional and should be struck down.

Vancouver Rape Relief, along with other equality seeking women’s groups, believe that the very breadth of the argument, applying as it would to the demand for prostituted women, takes it out of the realm of the public interest. The abolition of prostitution is what is in the best interest not only of women and girls currently being prostituted but of all women and the Canadian public. Hilla Kerner, for Vancouver Rape Relief & Women’s Shelter argues that “allowing men to buy, and profit from women’s bodies is further abandonment of women in prostitution. The Canadian state needs to protect women by providing them with economic security and by preventing and sanctioning sexual exploitation and violence.”

Christine Boyle QC, professor of law at the University of British Columbia, has also expressed concern about granting public interest standing to attack laws criminalizing the demand for prostitution. She comments that “Canada has made an international commitment (in the Palermo Protocol against Trafficking in Persons) to “strengthen legislative and other measures to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking”. It is difficult to see how an argument which goes beyond protecting vulnerable people and seeks to strike down laws which can be used to discourage the demand for women to prostitute is in the “public interest”.

Suzanne Jay of the Asian Women Coalition Ending Prostitution states "The trafficking and prostitution of Asian women is highly visible and yet largely ignored or dismissed. Any legal challenge to laws around prostitution must also challenge the entrenchment of massage parlours stocked with Asian women in cities and towns all over Canada. She further insists that Canadian law should deter organized crime, not enhance opportunity for men to exploit and harm more women with greater impunity."

In order to abolish prostitution and see an end to sexual exploitation of women and girls in Canada, the Canadian state needs to provide comprehensive exit services. These would include: detox beds, transition houses, child care, health care, guaranteed livable income, safe affordable housing, and access to education and training opportunities.

Vancouver Rape Relief and Women’s Shelter works with women in prostitution and all women who have experienced violence at the hands of men. We strongly disagree with the position of the Downtown Eastside Sex Workers United Against Violence Society. Striking down the current prostitution laws would reinforce the sexist violence and sexual exploitation of individual women and girls, and directly affect the dignity and quality of life of all women and girls at the hands of men who buy and profit off the bodies of women and girls. We argue eliminating these laws would act against the public’s interest and would be a direct step backwards in ending violence against women.

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