



April 7, 2021

The Honourable David Lametti
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
180 Wellington Street, Office 609, House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Minister David Lametti,

The Working Group against Sexual Exploitation in Canada is a subcommittee of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), a broad and inclusive ecumenical body representing 26 member churches throughout Canada. Today, we request your leadership to endorse, strengthen and enforce our current prostitution law, ***The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*** (PCEPA).

We regret that sexism and racism are widespread throughout Canada today. The act of buying sex is part of a continuum of violence against women and children, a human rights violation that targets the most vulnerable in our country. **It is neither work nor safe but a form of gender and racial inequality.**

Mirroring the Equality Model, PCEPA criminalizes the purchase of sexual services while decriminalizes prostituted persons, recognizing the inherent harm caused by sex buying. When the law was passed, a commitment was made to provide services to prostituted persons for exiting and stabilizing their lives. The goal of PCEPA is to end exploitation which is rooted in gender inequality and reflects an imbalance of economic and social power - a totally unequal playing field. The demand for paid sexual services fuels a global multi-billion-dollar sex market, built largely on the backs of those who are racialized and marginalized.

In Canada, Indigenous women and girls are grossly and tragically over-represented in commercial sexual exploitation. A 2005 Vancouver study found that among the women in prostitution surveyed, 52% were Indigenous. Similarly, a network of front-line service organizations across Canada estimated that of the women and girls they serve who have been sexually exploited in prostitution, 50 % of girls and 51 % of women were Indigenous. This is particularly startling considering Indigenous peoples only comprise 4.8 % of Canada's population. In contrast, almost 100% of sex buyers are white males, with employment and an above average education.

Stopping the **demand** is the only viable solution to this systemic injustice. In 2000, the UN articulated the Palermo Agreement with 173 countries signed on. Canada ratified in 2002. In Section 3, Article 9.5 states: **Parties shall adopt or strengthen legislative or other measures, such as educational, social or cultural measures, including through bilateral and multilateral cooperation to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking.**

Sweden was the first country to enact **demand-focused** legislation in 1999. Since then, Sweden has recorded a seismic cultural shift where the majority now recognize prostitution as a significant barrier to women's equality.



Canadians have made their voices clear. In a 2020 national survey conducted by Nanos Research our citizens showed solid support for Canada's prostitution legislation.

Government, committed to equality and ending violence and racism, must reject any calls for the decriminalization of pimping, brothel owning and sex buying. Legalization and decriminalization of prostitution in other countries has failed. Decriminalization triggers the expansion of a market of commercial sexual exploitation that disastrously renders this exploitation as a legitimate business, a system that richly profits from the abuse, torture and even death of women and girls. Legalizing or fully decriminalizing only leads to an increase in sex trafficking.

Since New Zealand decriminalized prostitution, it has become a destination country for traffickers with an increase of street prostitution, child prostitution, male violence, and instances of rape and sexual assault. Male violence towards women and girls has become normalized, causing extreme psychological and physical harm. Organized crime and gangs have infiltrated the business causing further danger. Pimps, traffickers and buyers have total control over the bodies of women and girls for their economic gain, profit and pleasure.

We implore you, Minister Lametti, to reject any call to fully decriminalize the sex industry or repeal PCEPA. We urge you to uphold, strengthen and ensure the enforcement of PCEPA in every Canadian jurisdiction. We call for investment in comprehensive exit supports and services envisioned by PCEPA. We ask that the government respect our commitment to the Palermo Agreement by promoting the rights of all women and girls, demonstrating Canada's commitment to the Indigenous Peoples. Until this law is fully implemented and enforced in all jurisdictions, there will be no gender equality in Canada.

We have every confidence that the Government will uphold and fully implement PCEPA, so that Canada will be recognized as a nation that protects the human rights of all citizens. Your leadership in this regard would stand as a global example in the pursuit of gender equality and racial justice.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Diane Dwarka, Co-Chair
Working Group on Sexual Exploitation

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