

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**  
**VOTE FOR A RESOLUTION TO LEGALIZE PROSTITUTION**  
**What are the arguments for this shocking decision?**

August 2015  
Dr. Muriel SALMONA  
Association President  
[Mémoire Traumatique et Victimologie](mailto:drmsalmona@gmail.com)  
[drmsalmona@gmail.com](mailto:drmsalmona@gmail.com)  
<http://www.memoiretraumatique.org>

This August 11, 2015 in Dublin, as part of the implementation of major strategic directions, the 500 delegates of Amnesty International's International Council passed a [resolution](#) advocating the decriminalization of prostituting system (prostitutes, pimps and customers), to protect those that Amnesty calls "the sex workers," while excluding from that decriminalization coercive systems, child prostitution and trafficking in human beings.

The resolution was drafted after nearly two years of consultation and bitter opposition within Amnesty, and from many organizations and associations (abolitionists, feminists and/or fight against violence), from political and other personalities, care professionals, survivors of prostitution, etc. Numerous petitions and open letters were circulated; many signatures were collected, such as those of [CEDAW](#), or [Prostitutionresearch](#). Melissa Farley appealed and got [153 signatures from scholars and academics \(including mine\) in 19 countries](#).

**Amnesty advocates liberalization and legalization of prostitution, and is promoting it**

What a paradox! An NGO fighting for the rights of people is advocating for the most vulnerable women to be exposed to sexual violence, which is one of [the most traumatic forms of violence](#) along with torture.

On behalf of the defense of prostitutes against discrimination and state violence (harassment and police brutality), Amnesty advocates the legalization of prostitution and prostituting systems, and delivers without qualms the most vulnerable people (traumatized women, abandoned by all, very precarious) to sex merchants and their customers. Amnesty, as we shall see, is not content to ignore the violence of the prostitution itself and the infringement of rights, dignity and physical and mental integrity of the persons (violence of repeated tricks, objectification of people, staged humiliation and submission); Amnesty denies the violence of johns and pimps, and the daily risk of being tortured, kidnapped, killed, or made to disappear. To such an extent that in its resolution, it denies the psychological impact of prostitution on prostitutes, it denies sexual

violence that prostitutes have undergone in childhood, prior to entry into prostitution, that make them preferred targets for johns. Amnesty, in a word, promotes the prostituting system into a commercial activity like any other, a job like any other, with the arguments of pro-prostitution groups.

Today the legalization of prostitution is increasingly challenged, prostitution is increasingly recognized as violence against women. Many countries are following Sweden in penalizing the client and thus discouraging demand, more and more personalities in Germany and in the Netherlands (countries with legalized prostitution for over 10 years) are questioning the legalization ([Psychotraumatologues Manifesto launched by Ingeborg Kraus](#), letter to Angela Merkel), because they recognize the very significant increase of prostitutes, trafficking and organized crime, and they recognize the seriousness of psychological trauma among prostitutes; moreover they find that the reason for setting up this legalization (ensuring better protection and more rights for prostitutes by enabling them to regularize their activity) has not been translated into action. The number of foreign and very vulnerable prostitutes in these countries is increasing, the sex trade is flourishing, with exponential requests for more and more extreme "sexual services," and even the setting up of a sex market with promotions.

AI becomes an accomplice of men who want to keep the exorbitant privilege to view women's bodies reduced to a commodity. By abuse of language they call it sex, sex work, voluntary prostitution, and they intentionally confuse sexuality and predation. Freedom would be a top value for them, freedom to do what they want as part of "their sexual lives," freedom for women to sell their bodies the time of a trick. For them, limiting that freedom would be a kind of oppression or a return to reactionaries' values. With this reasoning, they allow themselves to consider all those who denounce such violence as moralistic, stigmatizing and discriminating people against prostitutes. However, everyone's freedom has limits—it stops where the freedom and rights of others begin. The law, including the International Law about human rights, provides for restrictions of rights and freedoms. This is the case of the European Convention of Human Rights.

Liberty has meaning only in a world where equal rights for everyone are respected. Freedom presupposes respect for the law and it must be the freedom of all, the strong and rich as well as the weak and vulnerable; freedom, law and equality are inextricably linked. Otherwise we end with the "freedom of the free fox in the free henhouse..." And we can quote the famous phrase of Lacordaire: "Between the strong and the weak, between the rich and the poor, between master and servant, it is freedom that oppresses and the law that liberates."

The consent of a person into prostitution is framed by rights. It's not because someone agrees to waive their rights for the benefit of another

person that this latter is cleared, they remain entirely responsible for the respect for the dignity and the physical and psychological integrity of others. To take the example further, even if a person agrees to be tortured, mutilated, enslaved, killed, cut into pieces, deprived of his eyes, one cannot take the opportunity to mutilate, enslave, kill, cut him into pieces, depriving him of his eyes, even claiming that this will improve his precarious situation. In all cases these acts remain crimes punishable by law, and the fact of financially compensating the person changes nothing. On the contrary, the body is inalienable and cannot be bought.

### **The shock is enormous!**

How and why does an organization defending human rights advocate total liberalization of a system of domination which is extremely profitable, sexist and racist, which sexually exploits the most vulnerable and discriminated people in the world, so that men can pay to access their bodies, their privacy, and use them as sexual objects to be enjoyed, have fun with, dominate, submit, even humiliate or torture sexually.

Amnesty could argue that in its resolution, it carefully specifies that prostitutes must be protected first, and that their activity has to be decriminalized in countries where it is illegal (which is not the case in abolitionist countries like France). They want to criminalize human trafficking for sexual purposes, as well as child prostitution, with which we agree of course. But nothing is proposed to combat these crimes, and nothing is specified either to inform the public about the reality of human trafficking and child prostitution, about the age of entry into prostitution—under 18 for more than half of prostitutes—nor to inform the public about what is happening in countries that have legalized prostitution. AI does not give any figures on these criminal realities, nor the actual percentage of prostitutes who are "free," willingly exercising, without coercion, for the protection of which this proposal was developed. Moreover, you cannot find in this text any analysis of the male domination system, nor the words that 95% of prostitutes are women, and that customers are almost only men.

### **For Amnesty, prostitution should be a job like any other**

AI proposes to turn prostitution into work, and prostitutes into "sex workers" (the term is repeated ad nauseum throughout the resolution), who should work in accordance with labor law, with "just and favorable" conditions, working with "safety standards." A job for those over 18...and what would be the training and benefits of unemployed if they do not accept such "work" proposed by administrative bodies managing the unemployed? Pimping is presented as "the general organization of sex work." Prostitution would become one of the few jobs that offers profit

sources to people discriminated against in employment, such as transgender people: "for some sex workers the decision to sell sexual services is a matter of suitability or preference – it may offer flexibility and control over working hours or a higher rate of pay than other options." (sic!) How fortunate it would be if we stopped considering that prostitution is a criminal activity, and if we stopped criminalizing these poor pimps who just want to protect their "workers" and those poor clients who allow them to get rich! AI concedes that "other individuals may turn to sex work as a means of immediate survival because of extreme poverty or other forms of social exclusion." And what about the [85% to 95% prostitutes who want to get out of this situation?](#)

**For Amnesty, prostitution does not affect the rights of individuals, it is criminalization of this job which is a violation of their rights and discrimination**

The argument AI develops is that if prostitutes suffer violence by state actors and "others," the cause is discrimination, stigmatization and lack of recognition of their status as "sex workers." It is this lack of recognition which exposes them to persecution, it would suffice to stop stigmatizing this "profession," to legalize it and to provide guarantees in terms of labor law to ensure that prostitutes would be protected from violence...and AI claims that this violence is worsened by laws that force them to hide for their work, and therefore to be more exposed to the worst violence: therefore it is the law which jeopardizes human rights!

**Amnesty evades the fact that prostitution violates the rights to equality, security and health of people experiencing prostititional activity.**

Our experience and expertise as health care professionals having cared for people experiencing prostitution, for more than 20 years, and many international medical studies on the impact of prostitution on health, show that prostitution is—in addition to an affront to dignity and gender discrimination—an infringement of living safely without suffering violence. In addition these studies show that this situation prevents them from being treated in an appropriate way by qualified professionals when necessary (prostitution represents a significant loss of opportunity for health).

**The violence inherent to prostitution, violence exercised by customers, is ignored by Amnesty**

Note that AI carefully avoids naming the violence suffered by prostitutes apart from state violence (evictions, police violence) that it binds to

discrimination and stigmatization. At no time do we read in this resolution words as rape, sexual assault, physical, psychological and verbal violence, attempted murder, violence that all prostitutes suffer frequently; never does the text speak of prostitutes' main aggressors, who are customers, followed by pimps.

As a reminder, 70% to 95% suffer physical violence, 60% to 75% were raped during prostitutorial activity ([Melissa Farley, 2003](#)). Even the NGO Doctors of the World, which also calls for the legalization of prostitution in France, does not neglect this fact. This association did a survey in 2012 with Chinese prostitutes in their care, 83% of them had experienced violence since they arrived in France: unconsented condom removal for 63%, physical violence for 55%, rapes for 38%, sequestration for 25%, and death threats for 17%. The violence came mainly from johns.

A prospective study in the US over 33 years on 1969 women (John J.Potterat, 2003), showed that prostitutes have a much higher mortality rate than the general population (women of the same age, same origins) 459/100000 versus 5.9/100 000 (x78), with a mean age of death at 34 years old. The causes of death are homicide, drug abuse, accidents, and alcohol. Prostitution is the activity at the highest risk of death by homicide (clients, pimps) with 204/100 000 (in the most dangerous jobs in the USA there is 29 homicides/ 100,000 for men and 4 homicides /100,000 for women).

Violence by customers is replaced by intentional actions that would be good for the victim, since prostitutes earn money thanks to them, and all this is perceived as not so bad since it is their choice...but this form of violence is so serious, and so traumatic that only people who have already been sexually abused in childhood and had a state of traumatic dissociation can "bear" it; because they are physically and emotionally anesthetized and "formatted" from childhood to "stand" the worst without having the right to complain or defend themselves.

### **The psychic trauma of prostitutes are a stereotype for Amnesty**

AI writes: "The frequent stereotyping of all sex workers as victimized and/or psychologically damaged individuals and disempowering is harmful to sex workers, and unsupported by evidence." AI considers that this increases the discrimination they face!

AI says nothing about all the international scientific studies in psychotraumatology that showed that a high percentage of prostitutes have post-traumatic stress disorder and peri-traumatic dissociation. It just writes in an indecent way that this is "a common stereotype"!

And that is, in essence, the speech of Amnesty International, as we may summarize it, according to the text of the resolution: do not believe all the many caring people, feminists, who claim to help you despite yourself, and who want to prevent you from freely exercising the profession you have

chosen, it is not true that this "work" will harm your mental health; stopping you from exercising it in good condition, stigmatizing your "work" and penalizing clients and pimps is prejudice. The people who say they want to protect you, are those who expose you to the worst violence...

### **We are in the totalitarian world Orwell described in 1984:**

Exploitation and domination is freedom; exploiters are your protectors; abolitionists are criminal; the law is crime; fee-based rape is work; being traumatized and dissociated is a guarantee for a healthy life, etc.

### **For prostitutes the traumatisms are extreme**

68% of prostitutes have psychotraumatic disorders (PTSD du DSM V, post-traumatic stress disorder) according to [Melissa Farley's study in 2003](#) of 854 prostitutes in 9 countries; in another study over 70% of prostitutes had symptoms of traumatic dissociation.

[These injuries are caused by repeated violence experienced by prostitutes](#) (and psychotraumatic disorders are normal responses related to the development of neuro-biological mechanisms against the extreme stresses caused by the violence). [This violence is omnipresent](#): violence from the situation of prostitution itself, violence to which prostitutes are exposed, violence preceding the entry into prostitution.

[Out of all violence, sexual violence is that which causes the most serious health consequences](#). They are equivalent to torture, and they lead to the heaviest and the most chronic psychotraumatic troubles if no care is provided. It is the staging of a real psychic murder, with psychological, neurobiological and psychiatric significant traumatic consequences as I described in my book, *The Black Book of Sexual Violence*, published in French by Dunod (Paris) in 2013.

These psychotraumatic consequences are used by the system of prostitution to exert slavery on and submission by prostitutes. Violence is used by johns to power a feeling of omnipotence through the emotional anesthesia they get, in no case is there any sexual desire; it is an eroticized violence to achieve (as we are going to see) a shoot which is the ersatz of an orgasm. The emotional anesthesia they get will be very useful to perform many other kinds of violence, in a far more effective way. Everything is intertwined in a well-settled cycle of violence.

The thread to understanding all these phenomena is the traumatic memory of the violence, which makes the person relive violence in the same way (flashbacks, memories, nightmares) and which, without appropriate care, remains for years, even for a lifetime. This traumatic memory is the central symptom of psychotraumatic disorders that are installed after all the repeated violence experienced by prostitutes. These psychotraumatic disorders are a normal response related to the development of protecting

neurobiological mechanisms to deal with violence and the extreme stress it induces, as extreme stress can be responsible for cardiological and neurological damage.

We repeat, prostitution is quite traumatic for people in prostitutional situations, it causes serious consequences for their physical, psychological and sexual health, forcing them to deal with a traumatic memory that makes them relive all the most traumatic situations, and resort to costly defense mechanisms and anesthetizing survival strategies, resulting in dissociation process and decorporalisation: the psychic dissociation between prostitute personality and "private" personality of the prostitute, physical dissociation with disorders of physical and sensory sensitivity: hypoesthesia, anesthesia, tolerance to high pain.

The traumatic memory and traumatic dissociation which settle among victims are outstanding neurobiological safeguard mechanisms. These mechanisms do not only cut out the emotional system, but also insulate the memory structure from the sensory and emotional response, the cerebral amygdala. The cerebral amygdala is both isolated from the cortex (which leads to a disconnection of the victim from sensory and algetic perceptions and from emotions), and from the hippocampus, cerebral structure whose function is that of a very sophisticated OS, allowing integration of undifferentiated emotional and sensory memory in an autobiographical memory with a temporal-spatial referencing.

Faced with extreme violence, a person is going to end up as detached, emotionally anesthetized with a feeling of emptiness, unreality and depersonalization, as if she were foreign to the events; she can even smile automatically in a discordant way, or even laugh, disconnected from her body which seems to be a foreign body, a dead body, insensitive ([Trinquart, 2002](#)).

The lack of reaction, emotion and pain felt is convenient for all players in the prostitutional system, this will allow customers to exert the worst humiliations and sexual assaults without emotional hindrance, the prostitute will remain docile and smiling... This dissociation is very dangerous for prostitutes, it makes them bear the unbearable and it worsens the total absence of customer empathy.

### **Sexual assaults suffered in childhood, early entry age into prostitution, alcohol and drug abuse: myths for Amnesty**

Sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect suffered in childhood by prostitutes, early entry age into prostitution, the quantitative importance of alcoholism and drugs among sex workers, reported by numerous international scientific studies—this is swept away with a wave of the hand by AI, which says this does not apply to the vast majority of prostitutes. AI

does not quote any figure, and refers to only a few sociological studies without specifying their content.

But many studies show that 65% to 95% of prostitutes have been sexually abused in childhood:

- In 1978 in the United States in San Francisco, a study showed that 80% of prostitutes were victims of sexual assault: 37% of incest, 33% of sexual violence, 60% of rape

- In 1981, in the United States, a study of 200 prostitutes showed that 60% had been sexually abused, while around 10 years old on average.

- In 1986, in the United States, a study showed that 60–65% of prostitutes had been sexually abused in childhood.

- in 2003, in a study by Melissa Farley (in 9 countries, on 854 prostitutes), 63% experienced sexual assault in childhood, with an average of four perpetrators for each child, and the majority of prostitution cases start before 18 years old (on average around 13–14 years).

- In 2008 an Australian study showed that 75% of prostitutes had been sexually abused before age 16.

- In March 2010 the CFCV Feminist Collective against Rape (France) published a study of the 187 calls received from prostitutes from 1998 to the end of 2007: 100% were sexually assaulted before being exposed to prostitution. 402 abusers were counted, thus an average of 2.15 abusers per victim.

These staggering figures show that the entry into prostitution is a frequent consequence of violence suffered in childhood, particularly sexual violence. This almost never recognized violence (victims are abandoned to their fate without protection or support, in a true law of silence) is at the origin of injury to their dignity (the abusers mean for their bodies to no longer belong to themselves, that they have the power to deny them and to reduce them to sex objects that can be tortured for pleasure), of running away from home, and of prematurely leaving home to escape abusive family environments (risking situations and precariousness that jeopardize them). This violence is also the source of important psychotraumatic disorders that turn their lives into hell, by making them relive the terror and suffering felt during sexual abuse, pornographic staging by abusers, their foul and degrading language, and the excitement and perverse enjoyment of abusers.

And this traumatic memory will do that for the slightest link recalling the violence, the psychic field of these people will be flooded with scenes of sexual assault, by the "murderous" sentences uttered by abusers ("you are only a bitch, a whore," "you're only good at this," "you like it"), by despicable and humiliating behavior of abusers, etc. This colonization by violence makes these people vulnerable and can make them believe they are worth nothing, they have no rights and they "deserve it," they are "guilty



and must be punished," they "like" being sexually degraded, and "enjoy it," which is wrong of course but invented by the abusers, and the traumatic memory of the assaults (scenarios, excitement which takes over them is not their own, but those of abusers). This staging of the abusers, usually from the early childhood of victims, organize their shame, guilt and submission to the abusers' will. Reminiscences of sexual violence can be taken for "fantasies" of rape. Reminiscences of words calling her a "whore," and of sexual violence committed by several abusers can be taken for "fantasies" of prostitution. This is not a product of their imagination, but intrusions derived from violence that contaminate their sexuality and destroy their self-esteem while filling themselves with doubt.

Pimps and johns get a big benefit from sexual violence and all the abuse suffered by children, via psycho-traumatic consequences in the short, medium and long term. In particular, the traumatic dissociation increases, as we have seen, as does the tolerance threshold to dangerous situations and to pain, and enables customers to exert violence in peace without having to bear the emotional and physical impact on their victims, who can continue to smile in the worst situations; they are not less traumatized but it is masked by the dissociation and anesthesia.

**With this resolution, Amnesty International offers us an unfair world where men will easily continue to dominate and consume vulnerable women for their pleasure. Amnesty is betraying the rights of women and of the most vulnerable people and has chosen their camp, for the commodification of sex, prostitution's clients and pimps.**