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Responding to the Violence of Ongoing Colonialism on December 17th: International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE December 17th, 2013 - International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers is a day recognized all over the world to speak out against the violence, stigma and discrimination that people in the sex trade and street economies face. December 17th is not just a day for coming together to end violence against sex workers; it is also about what we do everyday to end violence against everyone in our communities.

We support the self-determination of peoples own experiences in the sex trade and how they themselves choose to identify and name what they do, including but not limited to: sex work, sex trade, sex industry, street economies and more. Self-determination exists in the everyday work of reclaiming our bodies, the spaces they are in and our inherent human rights.

Responses to ending violence against people in the sex trade are most effective when they recognize our strengths of looking after each other while also meeting people where they're at. That includes listening to what people need regarding housing and homelessness, drug use, poverty, sexual health and other intersecting issues. This helps to create environments where people can feel safer and supported in their homes and communities, be they rural or remote, as well as in cities and urban centres. Efforts can be about resisting systemic violence as a result of continuing colonialism, instead of 'rescuing' or 'saving' individual people and not making assumptions.

Ending violence against sex workers is also about ending the violence of colonialism from state systems such as child welfare, social services and the criminal (in)justice system that many of our communities face. For instance, criminalizing or arresting people, removing their children or access to them only removes support and puts people back into a system that often failed them in the first place. This is directly connected to the interpersonal violence that people experience, including sexual assault and domestic violence.

Ways to support people include minimizing the stigma they face, providing resources to make what they do safer and not excluding them in cultural or ceremonial events. Minimizing stigma is also about reducing the shame of sex and sexuality in general, which can help to restore positive and healthy relationships with our bodies and cultures through the decisions we make.

People in the sex trade continue to teach us about the importance of having sovereignty over our own bodies, to not be ashamed of our sexuality and to find community solutions to all of the issues we face daily including homophobia and transphobia, missing and murdered women, harm reduction, and more.

We must move beyond the single narrative that all people in sex work, sex industry or street economies are 'vulnerable', 'at risk' or 'marginalized' all by themselves. People are often pushed to the margins by systemic and structural violence - marginalization is not a pre-existing social location. It is also important to recognize that they are also community leaders, support their families, and are survivors who can teach and learn many skills of empowerment and deserve to be treated as such.

We come together on December 17th to call for an end to the violence that people in sex work, the sex industry and street economies face. We do this by calling for an end to the violence that comes from racist and colonial systems, which are not in isolation from all the other forms of violence people experience. Only through challenging these systems and restoring our own, will we end violence. Working in collaboration to challenge these systems by centering perspectives, voices and lived experiences of people in the sex trade is critical to ending violence.

Endorsed by: [Families of Sisters in Spirit](#) and [Maggies: Sex Workers Action Project](#)

To find a local December 17th event in your area visit: <http://www.december17.org/event-locations/>

Join us in Ottawa and Toronto as we co-host events for December 17th:

Ottawa - Decolonizing Sex Work/Trade Struggles-- Ending Interpersonal and State Violence(s) against Folks in Sex Trade/Work

TIME: 6:00 - 8:00 pm

PLACE: 420 Cooper (Centretown CHC) –room 208

Facebook event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/649986825052400/>

Toronto - December 17th Vigil for International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers

TIME: 3:30-4:30pm *Closed group* discussion - open only to current and former sex workers.

4:30-5:30pm Speakers and performances *Open to all*

PLACE: 519 Community Centre, 519 Church St, Ontario

Event website: http://maggiestoronto.ca/news?news_id=110

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) is an organization by and for Indigenous youth that works across issues of sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice throughout the United States and Canada.