



Native Women's Association of Canada

Understanding NWAC's Position on Prostitution November 2012

NWAC's position is that prostitution exploits and increases the inequality of Aboriginal women and girls on the basis of their gender, race, age, disability and poverty.

NWAC has passed a resolution that supports the abolition of prostitution. This means that our goal is to **end the prostitution of women and girls** through legal and public policy measures that recognize the state's obligations to (i) provide for basic needs and (ii) to protect women and girls from male violence.

We want to stop the buying and pimping of our women. We want to stop the sale of human bodies. We want women to be free from the poverty and abuse that targets them for prostitution, and to stop being blamed for their prostitution.

Prostitution is a particular concern for Aboriginal women.

Prostitution is not a traditional activity of Aboriginal women. The state has tried to disconnect Aboriginal women from our communities, our children, our families, our traditional roles, our language, and our culture. These incidents all contribute to the disconnection Aboriginal women experience from their own bodies and sexuality that is inflicted on them through prostitution.

Aboriginal women are grossly overrepresented in prostitution and among the women who have been murdered in prostitution. It is not helpful to divide women in prostitution into those who "choose" and those who are "forced" into prostitution. In most cases, Aboriginal women are recruited for prostitution as girls and/or feel they have no other option due to poverty and abuse. It is the sex industry that encourages women to view prostitution as their chosen identity.

NWAC stands with women in prostitution to demand that the state respect the Aboriginal, treaty and international human rights of Aboriginal peoples to live lives free from violence, poverty and to meet their physical, cultural and spiritual needs.

Legalizing buyers and pimps would not help Aboriginal women who are in prostitution right now.

When people speak about legalizing prostitution, they often mix together decriminalizing the women who are prostituted and decriminalizing the men who buy and pimp them. **It is wrong to criminalize Aboriginal women who are being prostituted.** This only further punishes women for their poverty and exploitation. It also contributes to the high numbers of Aboriginal women in prison and the separation of Aboriginal women from their children. **NWAC supports the decriminalization of women who are prostituted.**

It will not help Aboriginal women in prostitution to also decriminalize the men who buy and sell them. Johns and pimps routinely inflict physical and sexual violence and control on Aboriginal women in prostitution in all locations, whether indoors or not. They cause real harms to Aboriginal women and girls by exploiting their poverty, addictions, and add to their histories of abuse. They maintain the system of prostitution and profit from it. **NWAC supports the criminalization of the purchase of sex. We also support criminalizing those who profit from the prostitution of women and girls.**

Supporters of decriminalizing johns and pimps claim that women will be safer if they are prostituted in legalized brothels and massage parlours. We know that Aboriginal women will mostly remain on the street because racism and poverty selects them for the most exploitative forms of prostitution, wherever they occur. But the more important point is that **brothels and massage parlours are not acceptable spaces for Aboriginal women and girls**. The state has pushed Aboriginal women from one institution to another – residential schools, foster homes, group homes, and prisons, to name a few. NWAC refuses to accept brothels as the new official institution for Aboriginal women and girls and **we refuse to accept that prostitution is the solution to addressing women’s poverty**.

How can we end prostitution?

The prostitution of women and girls is not just an issue for women in prostitution. It is not an issue of morality. It is an issue for all women who support equality. As long as Aboriginal women and girls are bought and sold in prostitution, Aboriginal women will never have equality.

NWAC is a member of the Women’s Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution. The Women’s Coalition has intervened in the court case of *R. v. Bedford* to make these arguments. The Women’s Coalition supports the Nordic Model of prostitution policy which uses public education to discourage prostitution; criminalizes pimping and purchase of sex; and provides real alternatives to prostitution for women.

Key Points

1. Aboriginal women and girls need to be respected and valued. We want men to stop buying women and girls in prostitution. We want to stop the sale of human bodies.
2. The state should oppose the commercialization of women’s bodies. We want laws that criminalize the buying of sex and the profiting from the prostitution of women and girls.
3. Aboriginal women and girls should not be punished for their own exploitation or lack of options. We support the decriminalization of women in prostitution.
4. Violence against women is a serious offense and should not be tolerated. We support the criminalization of the purchase of sex and of those who profit from the prostitution of women and girls.
5. Aboriginal women and girls deserve lives free from poverty and violence. The state must empower and respect Aboriginal peoples to provide for their communities.
6. The movement to end prostitution is not a moral campaign. It is rooted in the equality and human rights protection of women who want something better for women and girls than to be stuck in prostitution and subjected to emotional, physical, and spiritual violence.