

July 6, 2017

RCMP 'E' Division  
BC Association of Chiefs of Police  
Municipal Police Agencies  
Director of Policing Services

Dear Madam and Sirs:

**Re: Call for Non-Participation in Operation Northern Spotlight in British Columbia**

We, the undersigned, are individuals and organizations deeply committed to the health, safety, and human rights of women, men and trans\* persons involved in the sex industry. As such, we are concerned about the safety and well-being of those in the sex industry who are at heightened risk of human trafficking.

We would like to express our opposition to Operation Northern Spotlight and ask that BC law enforcement refrain from any future participation in this national anti-trafficking initiative.

'Rescue' missions such as Operation Northern Spotlight do more harm than good<sup>1</sup>. A quick-fix attempt to deal with a complex issue, Operation Northern Spotlight sweeps up everyone present for interrogation, detention and/or arrest, without adequately distinguishing between those who are underage and/or coerced, and those who are not.

This strategy is one that is based on deception and manipulation, as evidenced by police posing as sex workers' clients in hotel rooms and 'shock and awe' raids on indoor sex work venues. These actions foster distrust and adversarial relationships with law enforcement. Pulling people out of the sex industry without their consent and penalizing those who do not agree to exit the sex industry does not 'save' or 'rescue' them.

'Rescuing' individuals who do not wish to be rescued has multiple impacts. Sex workers report being confused and frightened and may suffer trauma and even exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Sex workers lose income and experience economic hardship. This places sex workers in a precarious position where they must either accept dates or provide services they normally wouldn't to recoup losses. Operation Northern Spotlight can also have consequences for public health, as sex workers report reluctance to keep large quantities of condoms on commercial premises for fear of raids. Operation Northern Spotlight also has a ripple effect beyond those directly impacted, by driving sex workers further underground to

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<sup>1</sup> The basis for this request is evidence that has been compiled in Canada and beyond that this type of rescue approach is ineffective. See M. Ditmore, "The Use of Raids to Fight Trafficking in Persons" available at <http://sexworkersproject.org/downloads/swp-2009-raids-and-trafficking-report.pdf>, R. Maynard, "Fighting Wrongs with Wrongs? How Canadian Anti-Trafficking Crusades Have Failed Sex Workers, Migrants, and Indigenous Communities" available at <http://journals.msvu.ca/index.php/atlantia/article/view/3041>. A. Hill, "How to Stage a Raid: Police, media and the master narrative of trafficking" available at <http://www.antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atjournal/article/view/199>, and L.A. Jeffery, "Canada and migrant sex-work: Challenging the 'foreign' in foreign policy" available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/11926422.2005.9673387>.

evade police detection and making sex workers less likely to turn to law enforcement if violence occurs.

In order to be effective and to help exploited youth and trafficked persons, anti-trafficking solutions must be developed with the knowledge and expertise of sex workers. Combating human trafficking and upholding the rights, dignity and safety of sex workers should not be mutually exclusive.

As you are aware, British Columbia has a tragic history with regards to the deaths and disappearances of sex workers. In the past decade, progress has been made between law enforcement and sex workers to right the wrongs in the aftermath of the serial killer. *Forsaken*<sup>2</sup>, the report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, provided guidance to law enforcement on how to enhance the safety of vulnerable women in the sex industry. Operation Northern Spotlight is incompatible with the recommendations of *Forsaken* and does not have any place in this local context. Targeting individuals in the sex industry through approaches that induce fear and increase mistrust of law enforcement jeopardizes any chance of cooperation between sex workers and law enforcement. This type of repressive enforcement also threatens the foundation of a collaborative, multi-stakeholder, community-based approach<sup>3</sup> that is growing throughout British Columbia – a foundation that so many police officers, sex workers and community organizations have painstakingly built over the last several years. In short, Operation Northern Spotlight jeopardizes our ability to keep moving forward on our shared goals of reducing violence against sex workers.

We ask British Columbia law enforcement to decline any future invitation to participate in Operation Northern Spotlight. If the forthcoming Provincial Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines are modeled upon the Vancouver Police Department's Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines<sup>4</sup>, as per *Forsaken* Recommendation 5.8, Operation Northern Spotlight will be at odds with provincial guidelines for sex work-related policing approaches.

In closing, we call upon British Columbia law enforcement to work with sex workers to develop best practices to help and support trafficked persons while protecting the safety, dignity and human rights of all individuals in the sex industry.

Signed,

Andrew Sorfleet, President, Triple-X Workers' Association of British Columbia  
Annie Temple, The Naked Truth  
BC Coalition of Experiential Communities  
Brenda Belak, Lawyer, Pivot Legal Society  
Cheryl Giesbrecht  
Dr. Lauren Casey

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<sup>2</sup>For full report, see <http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Forsaken-ES-web-RGB.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>See *Forsaken* Recommendation 5.3.

<sup>4</sup>For full text, see <http://vancouver.ca/police/assets/pdf/reports-policies/sex-enforcement-guidelines.pdf>.

Dr. Sarah Hunt (Kwakwaka'wakw Nation), Assistant Professor, UBC  
Dr. Becki Ross, Professor, UBC & Co-Founder West End Sex Workers' Memorial  
Dr. Cecilia Benoit, University of Victoria  
Dr. Victoria Bungay, Canada Research Chair: Gender, Equity & Community Engagement, UBC  
Elizabeth Manning, PhD, RSW  
Esther Shannon, Founder, FIRST Decriminalize Sex Work  
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