

October 4, 2017

Ontario Provincial Police, General Headquarters  
Ontario Provincial Police  
Municipal police services  
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), “O” Division, Ontario  
Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police  
Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services and  
Ministry of Public Safety and Security  
Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne

**Re: Call to end participation in Operation Northern Spotlight and refocus efforts on support for sex workers.**

Dear Law Enforcement Agencies in Ontario:

We, the undersigned, are individuals and organizations deeply committed to the health, safety and human rights of all people involved in the sex industry and write to inform you of the profound harms — including to those individuals who are at heightened risk of human trafficking — that have resulted from Operation Northern Spotlight. We urge Ontario law enforcement to refrain from any future participation in this national anti-trafficking initiative and to, instead, create anti-trafficking campaigns through meaningful consultation with sex workers to ensure any future anti-trafficking campaigns uphold the human rights of people in the sex industry.

Numerous police services in Ontario have participated in Operation Northern Spotlight, where the vast majority of arrests have occurred,<sup>1</sup> in a claimed effort to fight human trafficking. The Operation, that first began in January of 2014, has perpetuated great harms on sex workers by wrongfully equating sex work with sexual exploitation and trafficking. Our Ontario member groups have reported crisis calls from sex workers during and after these Operations. By casting a wide net, police involved in Operation Northern Spotlight have approached, detained and harassed numerous sex workers where there has been no evidence of coercion, exploitation or human trafficking. When police raid indoor sex work establishments or pose as sex workers’ clients in their efforts to “rescue” human trafficking victims, sex workers have repeatedly experienced this as a form of intimidation, harassment, surveillance, and a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.opp.ca/index.php?lng=en&id=115&entryid=58079ba28f94acd753a18c5e>

gross violation of privacy that has further entrenched fear and distrust of police services.<sup>2</sup> For Asian sex workers, who may not speak English and have no reason to trust police, such raids and often warrant-less incursions into their homes and workplaces are especially frightening.<sup>3</sup> They also often result in anti-immigration tactics such as arrest, detention and deportation, which cause operations such as these to push sex workers further into isolation.

Operation Northern Spotlight has also undermined sex workers' health and safety. To avoid the greater scrutiny and law enforcement surveillance, interrogation, harassment, detention and arrest associated with such campaigns, sex workers are forced to work underground — or stop working altogether — reducing their capacity to earn money and their ability to negotiate safer working conditions with clients and with third parties. Campaigns such as Operation Northern Spotlight have intensified an already hostile relationship between sex workers and the police and deterred those in the sex industry from turning to law enforcement if violence or exploitation occurs. In a survey of Asian sex workers in Toronto and Vancouver, 95 per cent of respondents indicated that they never seek help from law enforcement — even if they are experiencing violence, abuse, harassment or exploitation. In Toronto, not a single respondent indicated that they trusted the police.<sup>4</sup> By alienating sex workers, Operation Northern Spotlight discourages those in the sex industry from reporting actual cases of human trafficking to law enforcement, frustrating the ultimate objective of such campaigns. It also places much needed resources into anti-trafficking investigations rather than other forms of violence for which sex workers need attention and support.

This is not a request to ignore or refrain from human trafficking investigations on the whole. Rather, we call upon Ontario law enforcement to **stop participating in Operation Northern Spotlight**, and to encourage an end to the overall operation. In addition we ask that police,

- Stop using anti-trafficking programs to justify the intrusion of law enforcement in places where consensual sex work is done, including indoor sex work businesses;
- Review existing anti-trafficking policies and programs that equate sex work with human trafficking, and revise policies to remove assumptions that sex work, absent coercion, is a form of trafficking or sexual exploitation; and
- Provide support for Access without fear/Sanctuary City policies that allow migrants to receive essential service such as health care without fear of deportation.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://cfr.info.yorku.ca/files/2017/06/Challenging-Trafficking-in-Canada-Policy-Brief-2017.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://nowtoronto.com/news/butterfly-effect/>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Sex Workers, Organizations and Individuals Advocating for Sex Workers' Rights and Community Well-Being

If law enforcement are genuine in their efforts to support victims of human trafficking, they must 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,

1. Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, Sandeep Parasad, Executive Director, Ottawa, ON
2. Aboriginal Legal Services, Caitlyn Kasper, Toronto, ON
3. AIDS Action NOW! Darien Taylor, Steering Committee, Toronto, ON
4. AIDS Committee of Ottawa, Cory Wong, Manager of Support Services, Ottawa, ON
5. AIDS Committee of Windsor/AIDS Support Chatham Kent, Michael Brennan, Executive Director, Windsor, ON
6. Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP), Haran Vijayanathan, Toronto, ON
7. Angel's Angels, Corrine Tombs & Angelique, Kennedy, Hamilton & London, ON
8. Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, Deepa Mattoo, Director Legal Services and Nora Angeles, Acting Executive Director, Toronto, ON
9. Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP), Shannon Ryan, Executive Director, Toronto, ON
10. Black Lives Matter, Toronto, ON
11. Butterfly Asian and Migrant Sex Workers' Network, Elene Lam, Executive Director, Toronto, ON
12. Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Richard Elliott, Executive Director, Toronto, ON
13. Carranza LLP, Macdonald Scott, Immigration Consultant, Toronto, ON
14. Caregivers Action Centre, Kara Manso, Toronto, ON
15. Chinese Canadian National Council, Toronto, ON
16. Egale Human Rights Trust, Helen Kennedy, Toronto, ON
17. Ernestine's Women's Shelter, Sharlene Tygesen, Executive Director, Toronto, ON
18. FCJ Refugee Centre, Varka Kalaydzhieva, Co-Director and Anti Human Trafficking Coordinator, Toronto, ON
19. HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario (HALCO), Ryan Peck, Executive Director, Barrister & Solicitor, Toronto, ON
20. Maggie's Indigenous Drum Group, Monica Forrester, Toronto, ON
21. Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers' Action Project, Keisha Williams, Interim Executive Director, Toronto, ON
22. Migrant Sex Workers Project, Chanelle Gallent, Toronto, ON
23. Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, Toronto, ON
24. Migrante Ontario, Jesson Reyes, Regional Coordinator, Toronto, ON
25. No More Silence, Toronto, ON
26. Noone Is Illegal, Toronto, ON
27. OHIP for All, Toronto, ON
28. Parkdale Community Legal Services, Mary Gellatly, Toronto, ON
29. Peel HIV/AIDS Network, Betty Williams, Interim Women's Health Promotion Coordinator,

Toronto, ON

30. Queen West — Central Toronto Community Health Centre, Anne Marie DiCenso, Director of Urban Health Services, Toronto, ON
31. Queen West Community Health Centre, Ritika Goel, MD, MPH, CCFP, Toronto, ON
32. Queer Ontario, Toronto, ON
33. Queers Crash the Beat, Mikiki, Toronto, ON
34. Sex Professionals of Canada (SPOC), Amy Lebovitch, Valerie Scott & Julie Grant, Toronto, ON
35. SWANS, Sex Workers Advisory Board, Tracy Gregory, Founder and Coordinator, Sudbury, ON
36. The Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union (COPE), Local 343, Ottawa, ON
37. Whippersnapper Gallery, Anique Jordan, Toronto, ON
38. Women & HIV / AIDS Initiative of Ontario, Molly Bannerman, Director, Toronto, ON
39. Workers' Action Centre, Deena Ladd, Toronto, ON

Individuals

40. Amar Bhatia, Assistant Professor, York University, Toronto, ON
41. Anna Willats, Professor, George Brown College, Toronto, ON
42. Brianna Greaves, Toronto, ON
43. Chris Bruckert, Professor of Criminology, University of Ottawa, ON
44. Deborah Brock, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, York University, Toronto, ON
45. Dr. Brenda Longfellow, Associate Professor, Department of Cinema and Media Arts School of Arts, Media, Performance and Design, York University, Toronto, ON
46. Dr. Megan Rivers-Moore, Assistant Professor, Pauline Jewett Institute for Women's and Gender Studies, Carleton University
47. Dr. Sheila L. Cavanagh, Associate Professor, York University, Toronto, ON
48. Emily van der Meulen, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Criminology, Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario
49. Eleni Marino, PhD Candidate in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies at York University, Toronto, ON
50. Eric Mykhalovskiy, Professor, York University, Toronto, ON
51. Gary Kinsman, Professor, Emeritus, Sociology, Laurentian University, Sudbury, ON
52. Harry Au, Toronto, ON
53. Lori E. Ross, PhD, Associate Professor, Social and Behavioural Health Sciences Division Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, ON
54. Jane Doe D.U. LLD (h causa), Sexual Assault Author, Activist, Educator, Toronto, ON
55. Janel Cole, Member of Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), Toronto, ON
56. Jamie Chai Yun Liew, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa, ON
57. Jennifer Porter, Program and Client Support Worker/Administrative Assistant, Maggie's - Toronto Sex Workers' Action Project
58. Laura Durmbrella, Masters Candidate, University of Toronto, ON
59. Loretta Mui, Toronto, ON

60. Lyne Genereux, Member of Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project, Toronto, ON
61. Marcus McCann, Lawyer, Toronto, ON
62. Marilou Gagnon, Associate Professor at the School of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa and Director of the Unit for Critical Research in Health, Ottawa
63. Melanie Spence, RN, Toronto, ON
64. Melissa Marie Legge, BSW, MSW, PhD (abd), McMaster University, ON
65. Michaela Beder, MD, Toronto, ON
66. Nicole D. McFadyen, PhD (abd); Social Anthropology; York University, Toronto, ON
67. Sean Lee-Popham- RN, Bancroft, ON
68. Shauna L. Weston, Sault Ste. Marie, ON
69. Tuulia, Law, Sessional Assistant Professor, York University, Toronto, Ontario