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Speech by [Julie Bindel](#) on 28th May 2018, transcribed by Associazione Iroko

I'm delighted to be here in a country I love. I first came here 30 years ago and immediately discovered that your food is far superior to the French. And five years after that I started to see the road from Pisa airport to Viareggio lined with trafficked women from West Africa and, later, Eastern Europe. I still love this country, but I am deeply worried about the moves to *further* legitimise your sex trade and I just want to say one thing about my position on this. I purposely left out trafficking in my book because trafficking is merely a process, not an actual distinct thing separate from the sex trade. Without the sex trade you wouldn't have trafficking. So, to fight against trafficking whilst ignoring your legitimised huge sex trade, like we have in the U.K., would be the same as campaigning against domestic murder and ignoring domestic violence. So I think we have to start, not by looking at how terrible trafficking is, but by looking at how *terrible* the sex trade is, and how one of the things that happens in prostitution is that it becomes global, which is the trafficking part.

When I decided to research to publish my [book](#) on the sex trade, I specifically focused much of my energy on writing and campaigning against prostitution. This was because everywhere I went in the world, whoever I spoke to, including many feminists and human rights campaigners, when I asked 'what do we do about the problems inherent to prostitution?' they always said the same thing. 'Let's legalise it,' they would say, 'making it safer for the women.' Already, however, there were reams of evidence about the disaster of regimes such as Germany, the Netherlands, some counties in Nevada (the U.S. state), Austria; it had become so clear that legalisation was a disaster that the pro-prostitution lobbyists, who are funded to make these arguments, turned to a different language. They began to call it decriminalisation but, to be honest with you, the difference between the two words is as thin as cigarette paper.

I have visited numerous brothels under legalisation and in New Zealand, where they have decriminalisation, and under prohibition, and I'm telling you that the most abuse and the worst sites I've seen have been in the legalised brothels. Just to say, I've never been involved in prostitution, although clearly as a woman, as every woman at this event knows, I understand male sexual violence very well; both the fear and the reality of it. But I know a lot about the sex trade. For the research for this book, for example, which is just two years out the 20 years' campaigning I've done, I travelled 164,000 miles, I visited up to 40 different countries, cities and states, I did 250 interviews, I went into the brothels and met the sex buyers, pimps, traffickers. I met those that support the sex trade, the academics who produce reams of research (I'd loosely call it) that backs up their thesis that this is "sex work", that women enjoy it, and that somehow it is a job like any other. I found out even more about the sex trade than I knew before and I found the answer to the question I'd been asking for decades: why is it that people tell you legalisation is the answer to the problems inherent to prostitution?

The reason why people refuse to accept that legalisation has been a disaster, even when you've got every single piece of evidence - murder rates of the women, a growth in trafficking and a growth in the illegal brothel sector in places such as Germany, the Netherlands and Nevada - is because there is an extremely persuasive, well-organised, well-funded lobby that peddles myths and lies about the sex trade. People want to believe these things because most of us are just good, liberal people who would rather believe that women are choosing to do this, and that somehow it's a need for the men, that

somehow men can't control themselves and that if they can't have sex with a prostituted woman, they will be forced to go out and rape a 'real woman', which is what sex buyers have said to me. People believe this. The reason why the myths are so persuasive is because there is money behind it for the pimps and the other profiteers.

Compare it to the mythology that we've had to tear down, brick by brick, about domestic violence. It's still a problem, but we no longer believe that a woman enjoys being punched in the face and having her ribs broken by her husband. Apart from the misogynists of the world, we no longer believe that women go looking for violent men and that men can't help themselves. We know what domestic violence is. But before the feminist movement dismantled those myths, we did believe this nonsense. So why don't we dismantle the myths effectively about the sex trade, when every piece of evidence stares us in the face? Purely because of the profit. There is money involved in this, and it's not just the mafia that is profiting. It's individual men who call themselves boyfriends. It's the brothel-owners in New Zealand, where they've decriminalised prostitution, to make it almost a mirror-image of Germany, under a different name.

The other reason is because some of the women in prostitution decide that they want to represent millions of poor, brown, disenfranchised women, who make up the vast majority of prostituted people. They decide they can speak for them. They decide that they know best. So the very few, the 1%, the tiny minority of those women, who I call tourists (they decide that they will float in and out of a bit of escorting here, some web-cam work there, they will fund their doctoral research by working on the end of a phone-sex line. They are white, highly educated, articulate), decide that they can speak for the women who are the polar opposite of them. None of us would listen to, for example, and African American man who told us we don't need anti-racism legislation because the police have never been racist to him. We would say 'good for you! Now go away and let people who make up the majority decide on what the policy and legislation should be'.

We all want to find ways for the women to be safe. But we know that the women and the men, the boys and the girls can never be safe in prostitution. We can only reduce the harm. That's not good enough. We don't talk about reducing the harm for sexually abused children or women who are raped. We talk about ending it. And yet, when you talk about ending the sex trade, many people laugh at you and say 'we can't stop prostitution'. I say 'really? Do you not think that we can end poverty?' and they'll say yes. 'Do you think that we can end child sexual abuse?' 'Well, yes.' 'Do you think we can end racism?' 'Yes.' 'Well why can't you imagine ending prostitution? Men are not born with this innate desire to have sex with a woman who isn't consenting. We call that socialisation and patriarchy. Of course there is no innate need for men to have one-sided consensual sex with a woman who doesn't want to be there. The propagandists that spin the mythology that leads people to say legalisation is the only way, know very well that, if they say prostitution is inevitable, it's always been here and it always will be here, people somehow absorb this and believe it. If I hear the phrase 'the oldest profession' one more time, I might have to do some damage. Of course it's not a profession. Of course that isn't the case. Children have been sexually abused forever. Does that make it natural and inevitable? Of course it doesn't.

So if we can imagine a world without prostitution, which clearly isn't going to happen in my lifetime but is on its way, how do we then think about organising our societies so that this is a possibility? We only have two options. Your country, my country, every country in the world has only two options;

legalisation (or decriminalisation, by its new name) or the model that's known as the Nordic Model, that is now the Abolitionist Model because it ended up spreading far wider than Scandinavia. You can't have anything in the middle. It would be like being a little bit pregnant. It doesn't work. That's just what we call regulation and that doesn't work; it's been proved not to work.

People will tell you that the Nordic Model has failed, that it is de facto criminalising the women. Everyone in this room, we all should believe that nobody in prostitution, nobody who sells sex should ever be criminalised for their abuse. So, what the sex trade lobby tell you, is that the women are still being arrested, that they are still in danger, that the sex buyers are so frightened of being arrested it makes them violent. You also hear that there are no exiting services in the countries that have adopted it, and then other nonsense about how this is preventing the women from doing what they wish with their own bodies, because "that's feminism, you know: being in prostitution, being penetrated by several men a day who you don't want to have sex with." That's feminism, they say. That's empowerment, they say. So that's what they will tell you about how the Nordic Model has failed. They are wrong on every count. The Nordic Model is not perfect. We don't want to put men in prison. That's why it doesn't matter that not many men have been arrested yet for this. We want it to be a deterrent. We want it to change people's minds about prostitution. We want men to see it's not cool, it's not good, it's not nice to pay for sex. That's where the Nordic Model is succeeding.

So, if we bring in the law that criminalises the sex buyers who, let's face it, are men, and decriminalises the prostituted people who, we know, are women, then how does it work? What do the men do, who can't pay for sex? Well, I have two suggestions; they either get a real date or they come to some other arrangement with their right hand. They won't spontaneously combust. Nothing bad will happen to them. They won't die or develop some terrible disease. We re-educate them to have sex with a person who actually wants to have sex. Some people can't get a real date. That's a shame, but it's not the end of the world. It's not a human right, like the right to life, food, air, water, not to be tortured or killed. So that's 'him' sorted.

What about the women? Well, the ones that love prostitution, the ones we hear from all the time, the ones that makes loads of money from it and send their children to a fee-paying school, have a second home in the countryside, love their work, love their clients, can't get enough of the sex. They can just carry on - we're not going to bother them. We're not going to come and arrest them, they're going to be just fine. So what do we do about the rest of the women in the sex trade, the 99%? We take the money that we're currently spending for police to arrest them, and we spend it on exiting programmes, we support the women through organisation's like Iroko, feminist and human rights organisations that understand this is violence against women and girls, caused by men. We don't force the women into anything. We don't force them to exit. But, frankly, we won't need to. They will come in their droves if they are getting the support that they need.

What about all of these brothel owners and businessmen and businesswomen? It would be nice if we could put them in prison, but I don't necessarily want our prisons to be full to bursting of those that don't need to be in prison. Perhaps we can just shut down their businesses, remove their assets, and give them to the exiting services for the women. That's them dealt with. Those who have raped the women that they're selling in brothels should be on trial for rape. Pimps should be on trial for pimping and trafficking. The last thing we should do is call them managers or business owners because that legitimises them.

This is a public health scandal. We heard about the disastrous health effects on the women and we'll hear more about the devastating traumatic effects from Ingeborg Kraus. I want to say one thing about one of the myths that you will have heard about how legalisation really helps the whole of society. That is about reducing STIs and HIV. It does the opposite. Legalisation means more prostitution, more sex buyers, and that those buyers have more confidence and legitimacy. They have more of a 'right' to insist on sex without a condom. When I visited some of the world-famous legal brothels in Nevada, in the U.S., I saw with my own eyes the opposite effects of legalisation. Opposite to what we're told about how this can reduce HIV and STIs.

I want to leave in your head what you would have if you had legalisation, if you had legal brothels. The state decides that condom use is compulsory for the sex buyer - he has to wear a condom and it's against the law if he doesn't. Can you tell me how many police officers you think would go into the room with the sex buyer before he abuses the woman? How do you think that that law is enforced? In reality, it's not enforced. In Germany, the pro-prostitution lobbyists are against compulsory condom-use. They think it takes away the freedom of the right to choose of the woman. Imagine that. In Nevada, when I visited the legal brothels, I saw the prostituted women walking around with sticking plasters on their arm. When I asked what this was about, I was told that every week they have compulsory blood tests. This is what legalisation is. The women are tested so they don't infect the sex buyer. The sex user is not tested and he doesn't have to wear a condom. The owner of several of the legal brothels is a man called Dennis Hof - you should look him up. He's a businessman who's written a book, bragging about being the world's best pimp. He rapes every single one of the prostituted women who go to work in the brothels, to test them out first. He doesn't call it rape, but they do. He does this without a condom and he says he never wears condoms. When he was asked why, he said the girls are all tested so he doesn't need to.

This is what we talk about when we talk about legalisation. It makes everything worse. The only option we have is the Nordic Model. You can go the right way or the wrong way, but we know that we'll never end prostitution if we keep looking at legalisation as an attractive model when, in fact, it's the worst disaster that we've seen in terms of women's freedom and violence against women. We will never end violence against women in a world when we accept prostitution.

Speech by Dr. Ingeborg Kraus 28th May 2018, text taken from her [website](#)

I am honoured today to have the opportunity to share our experiences with a law that legalises and normalises prostitution. **Far from protecting the women, "the German model" has become "hell on earth" for them.** I use this strong comparison on purpose, because the situation in Germany has become extremely serious. I will give you a short overview of the effects of this law.

Before I came to this conference, I spoke to two police inspectors who have long working experience in the milieu: Helmut Sporer and Manfred Paulus. Sporer¹ said that prostitution has risen up to 30% since 2002. We have made a huge mistake implementing this law and have gone in a direction few

¹ Interview with Helmut Sporer, 10.07.2014, Augsburger Allgemeine.
<https://www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/bayern/Immer-mehr-Prostituierte-aus-Osteuropa-kommen-nach-Augsburg-id30512282.html>

could have imagined would be so disastrous. Prostitution has nothing to do with sexual liberation, it is just money that counts. The profit of this business is enormous: we are talking about 15 billion Euros of direct transactions every year². It has become an important industrial sector where women's bodies are objectified and used as a commodity.

3500 brothels are officially registered. But we know that there are at least as many illegal brothels. So: the main goal, that wanted to bring the women out of the darkness, has totally failed. **It is the German state, by normalising prostitution and by guaranteeing a total decriminalisation of the sex buyers, that has contributed to an enormous increase in demand.** We witness the creation of mega-brothels with the capacity to accommodate around 1000 buyers of sex at once, and even more. "Flat-rate" brothels, where, for 70 Euros you get offered a beer, a sausage, and unlimited women³. This economical model of the sexual exploitation of the women has also led to an economical exploitation of those women⁴: they earn 30 Euros for sexual intercourse, while they must pay around 160 Euros for a room and 25,- Euro taxes per day; So they have to serve 6 men before starting earning money. These women are subjected to the rules of a free market of capitalism at its roughest: Their bodies are exploited to the maximum. We observe the kind of inhuman working conditions we thought have been surpassed since the beginning of the 20th century: these women live, eat, and sleep in the same room in which they receive their "clients". Many among them lead a Nomad life, moving from one city to the next and one brothel to the next to offer the sex buyers "variety".

The behaviour of the sex buyers became perverted overnight⁵ with a law normalising prostitution, whose message to men is clear: There is "a right" to buy sexual acts and there is no need to feel guilty about that anymore. The clients therefore see themselves entitled to demand more and more "services" for the lowest price. **It is the German state that is responsible for the development of sexual practices that are totally incompatible with human dignity.** I will preserve you from details, but today, completely legally, you can buy a woman and piss her in her face, do group rapes, or force her to swallow semen.

The makeup of women in prostitution has changed. With the opening of Europe to the east, women come from the poorest regions of Europe: Romania, Bulgaria — and it's often minorities like the Roma who live in extreme poverty. Today around 95% of prostituted women come from other countries. It has become a prostitution of poverty.

"30% of these women are young, under 21-years old. Often they are sacrificed by their own families in order to support them financially. The majority do not speak German. These young women come to Germany and are subjected to the perverse desires of these buyers. They aren't capable of saying

² Michael Jürgs, *Sklavenmarkt Europa*, 2014, p. 327.

³ Chantal Louis : « *Die Folgen der Prostitution* », dans Alice Schwarzer HG, *Prostitution, ein Deutscher Skandal*, p. 70-87.

⁴ Der Spiegel, *Bordell Deutschland*. 27.05.2013.

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/human-trafficking-persists-despite-legality-of-prostitution-in-germany-a-902533-2.html>

⁵ Radio interview with the Dominatrix Ellen Templin, 08.03.2010.

<http://abolition2014.blogspot.de/2014/05/interview-mit-einer-domina.html>

“no”, of defending themselves. They are completely overwhelmed by the situation and completely traumatized by it.”⁶

It is the German state that abandons the most vulnerable women and delivers them to criminal businessmen and sexual predators.

The working conditions and the level of hygiene have become disastrous. Out of 400,000 prostituted women (an estimate that is more than 15 years old), only 44 registered as independent business⁷. The vast majority remains illegal, which means that they have no access to a social system that would allow them to see a doctor. **The German state permits the exploitation of these women and supports them being crushed by the sex-industry, yet doesn't even include them in a social welfare system.**

There is a recent medical report from a gynaecologist⁸ who is working with prostituted women. The health condition of these women is catastrophic. Within 30 years they often show signs of early-ageing. All women have persistent abdominal pains, gastritis, and frequent infections due to the unhealthy state of living conditions. And of course, all kinds of sexually transmissible diseases. The psychological traumatising can just about be tolerated with alcohol and pharmaceutical drugs. He reports about a growing demand for pregnant women in prostitution. Those women have to serve 15 to 40 men a day continuously until they give birth. Very often, they abandon their child and go to work as soon as possible. Sometimes 3 days after birthing the child. Those practices are totally irresponsible for the health of the mother and her child. It can cause irreversible damage to the unborn child. It is absurd to speak of the “reproductive rights“ of women in prostitution, **this here is about the sex buyers' rights, and to guarantee them their rights of flourishing without restraint or restriction.**

I was asked by the Women's Health Mental Organisation to speak last year at the world conference in Dublin about the mental health situation of prostituted women in Germany. What can I say? What is the mental health situation of a woman that is reduced to a piece of meat? They are totally destroyed. A woman that is working in an exit program for prostituted women told me that there are very few women exiting prostitution. They will stay until they break down physically. It is just a matter of time. I asked myself, why it is like this? Because their will has been broken. They do not exist any more as a person that has an identity and a future they can imagine for themselves. We are talking here about complex traumatising. **Free-Choice prostitution is even worse than forced prostitution:** because the trafficker is not a stranger but somebody they love or someone from their own family. Exiting prostitution causes deep internal conflict.

⁶ Sabine Constabel, a social worker who has worked with prostituted women in Stuttgart für 20 years, made the following statements in a television interview on Oct. 17, 2013.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpCPKDRcFg0>

⁷ Michael Jürgs, Sklavenmarkt Europa, 2014, P. 327.

⁸ Dr. Wolfgang Heide: Stellungnahme zur öffentlichen Anhörung zur „Regulierung des Prostitutionsgewerbes“ im Ausschuss für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Gesundheit im Deutschen Bundestag am 06. Juni 2016.

<https://www.trauma-and-prostitution.eu/2016/06/05/stellungnahme-von-wolfgang-heide-facharzt-fuer-gynaekologie-und-geburtshilfe/>

A study by the German ministry for family affairs in 2004⁹ demonstrated that 87% of the women in prostitution reported having been exposed to physical violence, 82% to emotional violence, 92% to sexual harassment, 59% to sexual violence. These figures alone make it difficult to compare prostitution to a job like any other. And this research was conducted more than 10 years ago; things have since deteriorated significantly. **Violence is an inherent part of prostitution but the German state continues to deny these facts!**

Seen from the perspective of psychotraumatology¹⁰, prostitution is not a job like any other. To allow strangers to penetrate one's body, natural phenomena must be extinguished: fear, shame, disgust, alienation, contempt, self-blame. In their place women put: indifference, neutrality, a functional conception of penetration, a reinterpretation of this act as a "job" or "service". These women have learned very early on how to dissociate. In fact, many studies¹¹ on this subject demonstrate a strict correlation between entering prostitution and violence experienced during childhood. **These women were abandoned a first time in their childhood, and are abandoned a second time by a state's politics that legitimises their sexual exploitation.**

Prostitution as a system uses this traumatising for its own ends and profit. Under no circumstances can prostitution be defined as "work" or "a service". The erogenous and reproductive body parts of women are too sensitive to be objectified for the use as work tools. Prostitution can only be practised in a state of pathological dissociation.

In addition, prostitution can not be viewed as a job, as it is traumatising. Numerous studies¹² have shown that **the risk of developing post traumatic stress disorder is higher in prostitution than it is in war.**

The "German model" of legalising prostitution has shown itself to be a law obliging the criminal world and has turned Germany into traffickers', procurers' and brothel keepers' Eldorado, as Manfred Paulus, Chief Inspector with the police, has stated¹³. The police are rendered powerless when faced with a law that has strengthened the prostitution system and has made criminals into recognised

⁹ Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend : *Gender Datenreport »*, Kapitel 10: *Gewalthandlungen und Gewaltbetroffenheit von Frauen und Männern*, P. 651-652, 2004.

¹⁰ Michaela Huber, *Trauma und Prostitution aus traumatherapeutischer Sicht*, 2014: <http://www.michaela-huber.com/files/vortraege2014/trauma-und-prostitution-aus-traumatherapeutischer-sicht.pdf>

¹¹ Dre Muriel Salmona, *Pour mieux penser la prostitution: quelques outils et quelques chiffres qui peuvent être utiles. Chapitre 3: Violences avant l'entrée en situation prostitutionnelle.* <https://www.trauma-and-prostitution.eu/fr/2015/01/21/pour-mieux-penser-la-prostitution-quelques-outils-et-quelques-chiffres-qui-peuvent-etre-utiles/>

¹² – Study by Melissa Farley from 2008 that found that 68% of the women in prostitution experienced PTSD at a similar intensity to combattant veterans or people who survived torture. <http://www.trauma-and-prostitution.eu/en/2015/01/26/prostitution-and-trafficking-in-nine-countries-an-update-on-violence-and-posttraumatic-stress-disorder/>

– Study by Zumbeck in Germany in 2001, who found that 60% suffered from intense PTSD. Zumbeck, Sibylle: *Die Prävalenz traumatischer Erfahrungen, Posttraumatische Belastungsstörungen und Dissoziation bei Prostituierten*, Hamburg, 2001.

¹³ Manfred Paulus, *Menschenhandel*, 2014, p. 107.

business men. The law from 2002 didn't help to prevent trafficking at all¹⁴: in 2000, they were 151 persons condemned for trafficking, in 2011 only 32. The police recorded 636 cases of trafficked women in 2011, 3 times less than 10 years before. 13 of them were younger than 14 years old, 77 were under 18. The police feels helpless and complains that they have just little power to intervene, because without being able to deliver an evidence for the crime, they can not enter the brothels. Also, the legal proceedings depend on the women's statement. Very often they are too afraid to give testimony and the procedures get stopped.¹⁵

Those women – once they are totally broken – are simply sent back. You can imagine what it means for those countries. Imagine, every year, 10,000 Italian women coming back to Italy totally traumatized from the German brothels. This would be a national disaster, affecting the population through generations. A situation like after a war that takes a long time to recover. And what are those women sacrificed for? For what are they sent into a situation similar to war? Is it to protect the country against invasions or terrorism? No, those women are being sacrificed so that some men can have sex whenever they want, the way they want and with whom they want. **It is the German state that encourages those men to impose their sexual acts to thousands of women.**

Approximately 50% of the punters are in relationships¹⁶, so women are being cheated by their partners and husbands: Do the calculation yourself: every day 1.2 Million men buy sex. They are not the same every day. We must realize, that Germany is a country where millions of women are being cheated on¹⁷. Those women call themselves "Schattenfrauen"¹⁸, which means women of the shadow. They stay in the shadow of the system of prostitution, their voice and their Trauma are being ignored. They are left alone with the humiliation and indignity, which is also typical for trauma victims. Some of them have contacted me and they say that it is much worse if a husband goes to a prostituted woman than if he falls in love with another woman. Prostitution destroys the ability to love and therefore our fundamental value system. Trust, mutual respect and real intimacy become impossible.

The system of prostitution ferments hate! It pollutes human relationships. **A state that legalises the buying of sex, foments hate among men and women**, and destroys and traumatises relationships and families for generations.

It is also a severe problem for Europe and social solidarity among all European citizens. Germany doesn't seem to have a problem in using the most vulnerable women from the disadvantaged EU-countries, to exploit them sexually and reject them, when they are totally traumatised. People from those countries, when they have the opportunity, ask us, why we are doing this to their girls?

The politicians realised that something went wrong with this law and made small changes. Like trying to correct 10% of the "wrongs" done. Since July 2017 we have a new law called „prostitutes

¹⁴ Der Spiegel, *Bordell Deutschland*. 27.05.2013.

¹⁵ Bundeskriminalamt: *Menschenhandel*. Bundeslagebild 2015.

<https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Publikationen/JahresberichteUndLagebilder/Menschenhandel/menschenhandelBundeslagebild2015.html>

¹⁶ Claudine Legardinier und Said Bouamama: *Les clients de la prostitution*, 2006, Kapitel 4: Les clients parlent, p. 111-211.

¹⁷ *Deutschland, das Land der betrogenen Frauen*. Interview with a former sex-buyer, 28.09.2017. <https://www.trauma-and-prostitution.eu/2017/09/29/deutschland-das-land-der-betrogenen-frauen/>

¹⁸ Dr. Ingeborg Kraus, *Schattenfrauen*, 29.03.2018.

<https://www.trauma-and-prostitution.eu/2018/04/09/schattenfrauen/>

protection law“, where some regulation are being implemented. This is what Manfred Paulus¹⁹ thinks about this law: It is not with a condom that you will fight against international organised crime! The people who made this law have been totally naive! The women who come from abroad and work in the red light district don't get to know the Germany that the Germans know and appreciate. No, they are prisoners of a parallel society that is highly criminal.

These women live in constant fear. Germany, with this law, became the pimp of the most vulnerable women in Europe. **German politicians and the German state bear a historical responsibility in the development of a sex industry that creates thousands of victims of sexual violence daily, and makes enormous profit out of them.**

There is only one way out of this. We need the Nordic Model Now!

Thank you!

Speech by [Rachel Moran](#) on 27th and 28th May 2018, transcribed by Associazione Iroko

Personal Story

I'm going to speak briefly about my background and how and why I got involved in prostitution and why I pursue the activism and legislative models that I pursue today. I left home at 14 years of age, just weeks after my 14th birthday, and I was homeless. The following year, in 1991, I got into prostitution at the age of just 15. I had been homeless, on and off, for about a year at that point and I met a young man in his early twenties; he decided we could make money if I became a prostitute - he thought it was a great idea - a great idea for him maybe, but for me it was quite the opposite.

I spent seven years in prostitution; the first roughly two and a half of those in street-based prostitution in Dublin, and the last four and a half years in different forms of indoor prostitution - massage parlours and escort agencies, etc. The reason I became homeless in the first place, the reason I left home so young, was because both my parents had mental illness; my mother was schizophrenic and my father was bipolar. I came to find that this was a very typical story when I ended up living in state care. I looked around me and everywhere I saw young girls with very similar stories: different forms of disadvantage and extreme forms of dysfunction, some of which were much worse than my own. Some of the girls alongside me in state care had been sexually abused ritualistically in incestuous situations. We had a lot of problems in our family, but I was lucky that that wasn't one of them. So I quickly came to understand that, as rough as I thought I'd had it growing up as a child, there was a lot worse that was going on.

The common factor

A very important thing to note is that in the years that I was in street-based prostitution, what I saw, time after time, was young girls appearing on the streets alongside me who I had either known from hostels or who were friends of friends from state-run homes. The point here is that there was a whole group of young girls in Dublin's residential care centres and we formed a network of socially vulnerable young girls. It's from that network that women were simply plucked out and positioned on

¹⁹ Manfred Paulus: *Menschenhandel*, 2014, Klemm + Oelschläger Verlag.

those streets. It wasn't happening to the socially privileged young girls or to the relatively middle class young girls or to any girls that I could see except us. There is a persistent rumour that women and young girls get into prostitution in order to feed drug habits, but the truth I saw in prostitution was that most women were going into prostitution out of situations of destitution and homelessness, then developing drug and alcohol problems in prostitution in order to cope with the simple awfulness of what we were having to deal with every day, the way we were being abused every day. Imagine being used as a living, breathing version of something that a man would buy in a sex shop - a blow-up doll and the like - that's the way you're treated in prostitution. That was our reality.

I think it's sad and pitiable that in every nation on the earth there are women who are set aside, communities who are set aside, and are considered there for using. One of the worst statistics I ever heard was from Canada, where 56% of prostituted women and girls are drawn from the indigenous community, which is just 6% of the population. But what you have to remember is that they're only drawn from one half of that 6% - the female half - so what we're actually talking about is more than half of the prostituted women and girls in the entire country being drawn from just 3% of the entire population. That is a staggering statistic. The statistics for African American women are not much better.

The legalisation of prostitution in Germany and New Zealand

One of the reasons why I felt it was so important to focus on Italy - I've been in and out of this country about five or six times in the last two years - is because I know that it is under threat from the legalisation model that Dr. Kraus has explained. I've been to Germany many times and I've seen the signs up in the streets in Munich and elsewhere for 'a woman, a beer and a blood sausage' sold together as a lunchtime deal for men out and about on their lunch breaks. I'm also well aware of what's going on in the brothels. I've met enough women and enough activists who've told me about these brothels, 12 or 15 stories high, with a black women's floor, a trans floor, a pregnant women's floor, a gang bang floor, and the list goes on and on.

This is something that women desperately need to be aware of and we need to mobilise together as a united front, because if you get that here in this country, you'll have a hell of a time trying to get it back out. And you'll have the hell on earth that's been described here today in the meantime.

I was very lucky to get out of prostitution in 1998. I was 22 and I'd been involved in the sex trade for seven years. I think of that quite often, especially when I do this activism on an international level, because I know and I always knew that women who get into the sex trade as girls (and most women who get into prostitution are not women before they get there) do not make it back out in a way that they can pull their lives back together, get an education and move forward. I was very lucky to have those opportunities and I've decided to use them in a way that matters, because not all of the girls who I stood alongside on the streets are alive today. I've been to some of their funerals and I've avoided others.

I'd like you to really hear me when I say that anybody who thinks that you can divide prostitution and sex trafficking into two distinct halves, separate them as if they didn't depend on each other, genuinely just doesn't understand this issue. It's important for me to say that there are a lot of decent people out there who genuinely want to help, but don't understand this issue. They are misguided in their belief that the legalisation of prostitution will reduce harm and make prostitutes safer; the belief

that it will reduce the overt physical violence, broken bones and gang rapes. If that's what you feel and you think that legalisation is the way to reduce or prevent these things then you have to look at Germany or New Zealand, where I've visited to take a look at the model. It is a horror-show that is beyond defending.

I went to New Zealand in 2016 with a journalist friend of mine, to see the situation with my own eyes. We contacted people we know over there who work in frontline outreach and spent a couple of days talking to both the women on the frontline and those who are working out on the streets.

The first evening we were there, within ten minutes of being on the streets, we saw one woman who was actually prostituting from her zimmer frame - I just couldn't believe it. The woman was so fragile and so broken down physically, as she'd been working on the streets for 30 years. I assumed that she was well into her seventies at least, but she was actually 52, so this is a good example of the physical harm that comes from a life in prostitution for a woman.

Within ten minutes of speaking to that woman, a 28-year-old woman ran up to her and described how, moments before, she'd just been raped and robbed in a car. We continued to drive around and we couldn't help but notice the obvious over-representation of the young indigenous female population on those streets. The outreach workers told us that prior to the decriminalisation of pimps in 2003, they had been dealing with six to eight girls on the streets every night. Now, fourteen years after that model was introduced, they were dealing with fifty to sixty. They said that the steady climb in the number of women and girls on the streets had begun within six months of that legal change and was still ongoing to that day. So what is being asked for when we introduce these models of legalisation, of decriminalisation? No matter what you call it, it protects pimps from the law and sends the message to every every man in the country to go for it. This is followed by the immediate expansion of the sex trade. There is no avoiding it.

Prostitution and sex trafficking

Some people say that sex trafficking and prostitution have nothing to do with each other whatsoever, and other people say they are absolutely identical. I personally think they're both wrong and they're missing the point.

Prostitution and sex trafficking are intrinsically linked, you cannot separate them. Prostitution is the place where sex trafficking happens and it's the reason why sex trafficking happens. If there was no prostitution, if there was no market for young girls like myself from vulnerable, disadvantaged backgrounds, then we wouldn't have traffickers out kidnapping and abusing young women like Blessing. We're sisters, our experience are linked, the system we were abused in amounts to a system that doesn't give a damn whether you're a Rachel or a Blessing or anyone else. All it cares about is making money and creating a steady marketplace for women and girls to be violated by men who are so sick with sexual selfishness that they need to be told what to do, and we're going to tell them.

The term 'sex work'

I'm going to wrap up by asking a favour of all of you. The term 'sex work' was invented about 25 years ago. It come out of the San Francisco sex trade, designed with a deliberate intent: to normalise and sanitise prostitution in the public view. It has made good on this intent, it really has. The reason why it has spread, tragically, is because so many well-intentioned people are using it. They're using it in a manner that means that they're doing the wrong thing for the right reasons. What they want to do

is confer some dignity on the women involved by using that term, by calling this system 'sex work', by calling the women 'sex workers'. Trying to confer dignity is a decent thing to do, but they're going the wrong way about it. What they're actually doing is putting linguistic veneer over a very ugly situation. So I ask you, please, not to use that terminology. Prostitution is not sex work. It's neither sex nor work, so the term is a double insult. I could get into the bones of why, but to wrap it up really quickly, the nature of sex is one of mutuality. If this involved sex of mutuality then there would be no payment. It's not sex, it's compensated sexual assault. Nor is it work, because not everything that's compensated or remunerated deserves to be dignified with the word work. It's neither sex nor work, so the term 'sex work' is nonsense and when we use it we're doing the pimps' work for them.

Rachel Moran's book, [Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution](#), is an account of her experience in prostitution and its lingering influence on her life and psyche.

Speech by [Blessing Okoedion](#) 27th May 2018, translated by Associazione Iroko

Introduction, Chiara Carpita

Blessing is a young Nigerian woman who, after graduating in I.T., moved to Benin City where she met a woman who offered her work in a computer technology shop in Italy. Once she arrived here, she realised she had ended up in the hands of human traffickers and found herself put to 'work' on the streets. She found the strength to escape and report her traffickers and was then taken and housed at Casa Ruth in Caserta. There she put her life back together. Now she is an activist supporting other Nigerian women break free from these situations of slavery and exploitation and to combat human trafficking. Last year she published [The courage of freedom - A woman escaped from the hell of trafficking](#).

Blessing Okoedion

I am happy to be here and thank you for the invitation. I am delighted with the work that you do to help women give meaning to their lives. I thank God for this moment. Before I start, I would also like to thank all of you [present] who believe in women's freedom and the freedom of human beings. I also thank the community at Casa Ruth that helped me and sister Rita, the founder of that community in Caserta.

I remember when I arrived in Italy in 2013: I was so desperate, angry, afraid, and I saw so many Nigerian girls on the street. I remember when my exploiters told me that the only work there was was in prostitution. I remember when they took everything from me, that I felt awful and useless, like an object. When they told me "this dress isn't ok for you". When they told me "you can't wear your hair like that", I realised I had ended up in the hands of traffickers and had become their slave. I was 26 years old, had a degree in I.T. and I was unable to think about doing what I wanted to do. I wasn't allowed to use my phone because they didn't want me to.

I remember when they told me that I had to start working immediately. What kind of work are we talking about?, I thought. Prostitution. I asked myself why I had ended up there, in that situation. This wasn't the life I wanted for myself, it's not what my parents wished for me.

Why did I trust that woman I met in Benin City, who suggested I go and work for her brother in Italy? I wasn't ignorant of the existence of traffickers, I knew they existed, I read the newspapers, I watched the television, and I even spoke about it to my friends. But I thought it didn't involve us, that it was a path taken only by poor or selfish people. I never thought that a woman could want to traffic me. When this woman made this proposal to go and work for her brother, I thought about it, I talked to my parents about it and they trusted her. I wasn't on the streets, I wasn't looking for support, I had my shop where I managed computer repairs. But I met this woman who knew me well and who had introduced me to many customers whose computers I repaired. I had no reason to doubt her. So we did all the necessary documents. I'm not talking about something that took a day or a month, but a two-year project. It had never been said to me that I would travel through Libya.

When I arrived here [in Italy], they had reduced me to a product, to an object to be used and discarded when you don't need it anymore. They had taken everything away from me. I had many questions: who did I have to speak to? Who was going to free me? I was looking for a way out. I was in a foreign country, with a foreign language. I was very frightened.

I couldn't just keep quiet. On the streets there were many Nigerian women who had really welcomed me and that night they told me their stories. They were so open, I asked them questions because I wanted to understand where I found myself. I asked them how long they had been there for. One said two years, one year, six months. One even said she'd been on the streets for 8 years. I felt like I was already dead. Why were we there? Wasn't there a way to get out?

They told me that you get used to it, you get used to living a life of slavery.

They told me there was nothing we could do, that we were only a product for sale, because they were afraid, they came from poor families that received threats every day when they didn't manage to pay the decided amount. They lived every day in fear. They also told me that they were frightened of voodoo, although I hadn't done anything like this - I had only sent my CV and had an interview for this job! I had never thought I might end up like this.

One girl that was crying, when she saw a man in a car, put a smile on her face! These girls don't want to do this work, they really don't want to earn money this way, they are forced to do all of this because they have to present themselves as a product to attract customers.

This is how I decided to go and file a report. Because it is slavery: these marginalised girls, locked inside a house when they're not on the streets, that are afraid, with invisible tears, that carry heavy 'chains', whose voices go unheard and who search for the hand that might free them, that might break those chains of slavery.

I went to file the report and the police took me to a shelter managed by the sisters in Caserta. There I met other girls who had experienced the same story as me and had managed to free themselves. We can't say that there was anyone, among these girls, who chose to be a prostitute, to live that tragic life, becoming a product to use and take advantage of. I met one girl who told me: "I feel like an animal, like an object". I replied, "yes, I know, because I experienced it first-hand." I met many girls who want to live a normal life, who cry in silence.

You are here to listen. But listening is not enough. The important thing is working, fighting together to free these girls, these women on your streets, because theirs is not a choice.

Thank you

To watch videos of the original speeches at the event, visit the Youtube channel [Associazione Iroko](#) or [Resistenza Femminista](#).

For more information on any of the organisers or to contact them directly:

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