

NNSW and Women's Organisation's delegation met DCW Chair Swati Maliwal

6th August 2015, New Delhi



A delegation of National Network of Sex Workers and women's groups representatives submitted a memorandum to Chairperson of Delhi Commission for Women (DCW), Ms. Swati Maliwal. They opposed the statement of Ms. Maliwal calling sex work and prostitution akin to "rape" and calling for its "eradication". The delegation appealed her to immediately withdraw her statement.

Sex workers from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Kerala representing National Network of Sex Workers met the DCW chairperson on the 6th Aug 2015, between 10:30 to 11:00 am.

Delegation: Sakeena (UKMO, Karnataka), Meenaksha and Raju (VAMP, Maharashtra), Chandralekha (Sanghamitra, Kerala), Devamani (MMW, Andhra Pradesh). Gurukiran Kamath (Women's Initiatives, Andhra Pradesh) Rituparna Borah (Nazariya, New Delhi) and Rajesh Srinivas (Sangama, Karnataka).

The DCW Chairperson shared that she went to GB Road with some NGOs and met women who are in sex work. To the delegation team she referred sex workers as 'didi' (Sister). She had an exclusive meeting with sex workers in GB Road and share that she was upset with the sex workers as they were selling their bodies for just Rs.50/-. But the delegation representative clarified that they entertain the provide service to the clients and in return we get money. The members of NNSW recognize sex work as any other work. Ms. Swati share that there were young girls aged between 12 and 13 and were in a bad condition. Elderly women are having mental health issues. In reply to this sex workers shared that NNSW is against trafficking and we also ensure that minors are protected from traffickers. Ms. Maliwal shared to the team that women in GB Road have asked for her and rehabilitation and DCW will

plan a pilot intervention with few sex workers who are looking for alternative and there will not be any force for women to leave sex work. This will be only for those who want to give-up sex work.

In response to this the NNSW team suggested that a consultation with women in sex work was necessary before designing rehabilitation schemes. The team also shared the past experiences of raids and forced evictions in the name of rehabilitation, she assured that there will not forced eviction. Everything will be based on consent. The team explained her that sexwork is a stigmatised issue and people will not openly say that they are sex workers and they are enjoying it or comfortable in it unless we go with a non moralistic perspective. They also told Ms. Maliwal that NNSW and all its members are opposed to minor entry into sex work. They viewed it as abuse and had numerous measures within their groups. They also stated that NNSW had a strong perspective against forced entry of women into sex work. The team briefed her about sex workers collectives and how powerful they are in working against trafficking and on bringing HIV prevalence rate. "We are against trafficking and work against it. Trafficking happens for other purposes as well, which is not recognised."

Ms. Maliwal wanted to understand decriminalisation vs legalisation debate. She said she supports legalisation but is open to reading documents and hearing us out. She added that she is in tough with many Delhi based organisations and she will further discuss with these groups before she design further intervention. In reply the team suggested her to have a consultation with the pro sex workers groups and the team volunteered to organise this. But Ms. Maliwal shared that she will take this responsibility and she will invite a NNSW representatives for this consultation.

She added that she will form a committee of organisations and experts from Delhi based organisation as this committee is only have the jurisdiction of Delhi and she asked NNSW to suggest any NGOs which is working in Delhi who can be part of this. The team told her that what happens in Delhi impacts other parts of India. So any negative developments will impact on the lives of lakhs of sex workers across India.



Ms. Maliwal shared that she never made any statements against sex workers but some media has misquoted. The team asked her to issue a rejoinder to clarify her statement. She agreed to give a rejoinder and share that she will organise a consultation with sex workers and sex work supportive organisation in future. She also share that she has worked with grass-root organisations and she will ensure that women's rights are protected. She also requested the team not to give any press release.

Ms. Maliwal asked one of the delegates, **"what if you get 1 lakh in other job. Do you want to continue with sex work?."** The team members replied ***"I feel proud when I say I am a sex workers. Like doctors and engineers proudly state about their profession, I am also proud of what work I do"***.

Ms. Maliwal assured that she will be in touch with NNSW for any information she requires any she will soon send an invitation for the consultation.