

OPEN LETTER OF „PROSTITUTE“ ADRESSED TO BOSNIAN SOCIETY

Dear all,

I am your fellow citizen, neighbor, sister, daughter, friend and mother, but also I am a woman who sells love, how is specified in the classification of occupations. However, the majority of people call me "prostitute," which I don't mind, because it's my choice, it's my job and it's my life.

It is important for me that you hear what I have to say, and I ask you to take a few minutes in your busy daily schedule and read my letter. I will speak only for myself, although I know that my problems are also the problems of the majority, if not all, of girls and women in prostitution in this country.

I am addressing this letter to all the people, to men and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the reason is constantly ignoring and neglecting the population I belong. I hope you will continue to read this with an open mind, without prejudice, and really think about what I am saying.

Dear representatives of the government,

I am asking you, before you invoke laws to consider my words and don't tear up this letter. I want to inform you about some of the most common problems that I and most of the women on "our market" encounter very often.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, prostitution is punished by law. Every day we suffer from various forms of violence (psychological, physical, sexual and economic), but we can not report case of violence because of criminalization. For example, if you declare as a prostitute you are simultaneously on the other side of the law.

Before you invoke the provisions of the Criminal Law and the Law on Misdemeanors, which are the only official documents listing the issues of prostitution, and of course, in the context of sanctions and restrictions of this occurrence, I kindly ask you to look back and wonder what kind of solutions exist to our problems in this country?

Although we are often the victims of violence, ill-treatment and discrimination, there is no official document or strategy in which there is space for a solution to our problems. For this country we are only a problem whose solution is a strict legal sanction that keeps us from health, social, psychological, legal and other services in which we can seek for help, our basic needs, that in reality which you create no one has empathy.

This letter is also my appeal to look around, do something to change our lives, providing us with an alternative and help, making that our problems and our needs get real answers and real solutions. We simply want to enjoy the basic human rights that we, despite of conflict with the law, unquestionably belong!

Dear representatives of the media,

I remind you not to forget that your words have power, and that the words and opinions of sex workers in the mainstream media has no place. For this reason on behalf of all of us please do not forget the main postulates of ethics of your profession, objective and transparent reporting, and in this spirit writing about us increase the public awareness. Let our true voice be heard!

Please don't let that your newspaper writings identifies with the dangerous stereotypes that unanimously (sometimes unconcealed) says that the woman is valued only by its physical attributes.

We ask you not to express sexism and to objectify us as women, because in this context you send a message to men that it is perfectly acceptable to treat women as sex objects. Question: Where are the articles on violence against prostitutes? And if they exist, what they look like? I will tell you what they stand for: the focus is on the prostitute as a victim, or in terms used by journalists, "friend of the night", that is by its own appearance lead herself into this problematic situation.

I wish to point out that these views are very dangerous, because they significantly affect how the court members, judges, witnesses and police officers formed an opinion about the procedure of the victim.

We do not want that every time we open the newspaper see the terrifying, humiliating and insulting portraits of an "Immoral prostitutes", "Bloody Whores" and "Immaculate Virgin"!

Fight with us against these prejudices because our commitment to this job is a result of lack of a better choice and often the inability to present our knowledge and skills in other professions, socially acceptable. Remember the weight of your words when you agree or support prevailing opinion so choose them carefully when writing and talking about prostitutes. Simply, do not make more difficult our already difficult life.

Dear public,

To you I want to say that it hurts the most when stigma, discrimination and isolation comes from people who I thought I could trust the most. We agree that we have different opinion about this question – is prostitution better or worse job than any other professions? I won't go any further with this but I think the topic is interesting and worth of discussion.

I thought I was lucky not to live in a country and in time when they stoned women of my profession. But with your prejudices, neglect and contempt for what we do, today you are the ones who throw stones at me. I am aware that my work is morally unacceptable, but I am also aware that I am beyond that responsible mother, a grateful daughter, a kind neighbor, a good friend and an honest person. However, I doubt if you can believe it, and believe that all prostitutes are not the same! The truth is, my colleagues and I are not the same, moreover we are very different, but we all have one universal common characteristic – stigma, because of which we are abused and discriminated in all aspects of life.

Do not think that the negative stereotypes and prejudices, who's creators and purveyors are you, will contribute to the disappearance of prostitutes and prostitution, because it will not! I'll tell you something, prostitution existed, exists and will exist in the future, in all social aspects, in all places and times, and this is completely independent of your and my will.

At the end I ask you, if you felt hostile or aggressive tone in any moment when reading this letter, try to understand that it's because of years of open, systematic, generally accepted and supported discrimination which my colleagues, I and our closest ones encounter by the medical institutions, legal system, religion, media, academic community and general public.

I wish you a pleasant day,



Your „Prostitute“

Within a framework of the program activities of Association PROI is providing service and work with the population of sex workers. The letter you've read has been written by our client with a desire to draw the attention of all subjects included in this topic, and all with the aim to mark the *17th December*.

17th December is an *International day to end violence against sex workers* (prostitutes). From 2003 this date is marked around the world, especially in countries where sexual work (prostitution) is illegal and criminalized (as it is in Bosnia and Herzegovina). It's originally conceived as memorial day for 49 sexual workers who were killed by serial killer known as „Green River Killer“. Today, the *International day to end violence against sex workers* is an opportunity for uniting sexual workers around the world. By marking this day, attention is drawn to all crimes committed against sex workers around the world, as well as need for decreasing stigma and discrimination of this very vulnerable population. Symbol of resistance to discrimination and violence against sexual workers is red umbrella. Red symbolizes beauty and umbrella stands for resistance to attacks from sky and from people.

*Translation from Bosnian to English by Association PROI