

27 March, 2024

**To:**

UN OHCHR Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery: Call for input on the role of workers' organizations in preventing and addressing contemporary forms of slavery

79th session of the General Assembly in September 2024

Mr. Tomoya Obokata

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**From:**

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**Sex Workers and Survivors (SWSU)** is a human rights coalition of sex workers and trafficking survivors, many of whom have experience both as a sex worker and as a trafficking survivor separately. SWSU developed as a forum for research and discussion between sex workers and survivors who are allied in their advocacy for human rights, harm reduction, trauma-informed care, and survivor and sex worker-led research.

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Dear UN OHCHR and Special Rapporteur Mr. Obokata,

Speaking as a human rights-centered group of sex workers and human trafficking survivors (Sex Workers and Survivors United), we recognize that first and foremost, vulnerability must be addressed in meaningful, accessible, and culturally responsive ways to effectively prevent human trafficking.

Vulnerability to traffickers is artificially created by government policies such as inhumane immigration laws, police violence without recourse, systemic structural racism and misogyny, homelessness and poverty perpetuated by laws and policies, lack of access to healthcare and lifesaving reproductive health

treatments, and the largest prison population in the world where the [US Constitution](#) provides an exemption for state-sponsored slavery in its prisons.

Traffickers exploit vulnerability. In numerous ways, the US government artificially creates and perpetuates the economic and social precarity that predators exploit. This is compounded with inaccurate rhetoric and the harmful ways in which US law enforcement and related entities conflate prostitution or sex work with human [trafficking](#), and in many cases leads to people's [death](#).

The lack of labor rights and organizing protections for gig workers and freelancers is another obstacle to preventing human trafficking.

SWSU formed to build grassroots support and mutual aid that is informed by sex workers and trafficking survivors, for sex workers and trafficking survivors. We do this work in response to the violently misguided efforts of most police forces and social services in the US. In the wake of pro-Nordic Model legislation like FOSTA/SESTA, there is grave danger for those who work to decrease the precarities that traffickers prey upon. Assisting survivors and sex workers under current laws puts people at risk of prosecution if they provide mutual aid for basic survival needs in the form of money, transportation, or housing.

For example, I work as an editor who is frequently forced to spend days troubleshooting how I can pay writers who had their bank accounts shut down due to unbanking because of laws like FOSTA/SESTA. There is no clear legal recourse when you're denied access to a bank account or fintech apps like Venmo or PayPal. I know several trafficking survivors who were forced back to their abusers or traffickers because of unbanking.

For all these reasons, we appreciate your consideration of our work as a grassroots organization of allied sex workers and trafficking survivors, working to prevent and address human trafficking through mutual aid, research, and community support.

Thank you,

Sabra Boyd on behalf of SWSU

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**Have workers' organizations in your country played a role in preventing workers from being subjected to contemporary forms of slavery, or helping victims to move out of exploitative situations?**

Workers' organizations are a critical tool in helping individuals escape and avoid trafficking and exploitative situations by decreasing precarity that traffickers prey upon. Some of these organizations include:

- [Free Speech Coalition](#) recognizes that as a community, we face routine bias, stigma, discrimination and near-constant attacks on our character by those outside our industry. It can be difficult for industry members to find accepting mental health support. FSC offers resources that may help.
- [Aileen's](#) exists to enhance well-being and self-determination of women and others who engage in the sex trades in Washington state. Aileen's is a peer-centered organizing and hospitality space located in the region where Gary Ridgeway, aka "The Green River Killer" sought victims.
- [Pineapple Support](#) was created for online adult industry professionals, by adult industry professionals. Each of their professional therapists have been individually chosen for their sex positive outlook and support toward adult industry workers. They provide 24/7, trained support, professional therapy, counseling, and educational resources
- [COIN Clinic](#) is a program that provides free healthcare for sex workers in partnership with iconic transgender leader and activist, Cecilia Gentili. The clinic is the first of its kind and emphasizes the holistic well-being and dignity of sex workers while promoting an affirming, supportive environment to obtain healthcare without judgment, fear, or stigmatization.
- [BIPOC Collective](#) is a resource for education and support services to make the adult entertainment industry a safe space for everyone who chooses this labor. Their programs and activities are designed to be a catalyst that helps community members reach their goals and fulfill their potential and holistic well-being.
- [Strippers Are Workers](#) (SAW) is a dancer-led organization that fights to empower dancers in Washington so they can strip safely, positively, and earn a liveable income. By abolishing harmful

industry regulations and practices and creating dancer-centric community, resources, and legislation, SAW can keep stripping low barrier entry and accessible to a marginalized and stigmatized group of people who seek upward mobility.

- [Cupcake Girls](#) provides confidential support to those involved in the sex industry, as well as trauma-informed outreach, advocacy, holistic resources, and referral services to provide prevention and aftercare to those affected by sex trafficking. They provide nonjudgmental support to empower the program participants in their pursuits through respect, resources, and relationships.
- [Decrim New York](#) works to decriminalize, decarcerate and destigmatize the sex trades in New York, while fighting the racism and misogyny inherent in most anti-trafficking laws in the US.
- [Red Canary Song](#) is a grassroots organization of Asian and Migrant sex workers and massage workers, organizing transnationally. Their work is in the tradition of sex worker mutual aid, and we center base-building with migrant massage workers through a labor rights, migrant justice, and PIC abolitionist framework. They believe that the full decriminalization of sex work is necessary for the safety and survival of massage workers and trafficking survivors.
- [RedCheeks](#) recognizes that navigating intimacy in production is complicated. They make it a lot easier, less dangerous, more genuine, and ethical.
- [SWOP LA](#) is a peer support organization, run by sex workers and for sex workers. Their mission is to pursue our human rights to bodily autonomy, racial and social justice, and mutual liberation through outreach, education, mutual aid and political advocacy. Their vision is to usher in the reality where all sex workers are valued and respected. They fight for rights, not rescue.
- [DecrimSWCA](#) is a sex worker-led coalition of current and former sex workers, organizers, and allies who use political education, advocacy, and community outreach to promote the human rights, health, safety, and well-being of people in the sex trade.
- [APAC](#) advocates to maintain and improve safety and working conditions in the adult film industry by giving adult performers organized representation in matters that affect our health, safety, and community. They provide representation for performers in the adult film industry to

protect their rights to a safer and more professional work environment. They do this through peer and community education, development of ethical best practices, and fostering of solidarity. They review existing health and safety protocols and will initiate new ones as needed.

- [Abeni](#) exists to create a safe, confidential place for those working in the Orange County sex trades, as well as those being domestically sex trafficked. As allies and advocates, Abeni aims to be a present source of relevant, relational, and holistic support for those who are working or have worked in the adult entertainment industry.
- [The Sunita Jain Initiative](#) is a legislative think tank dedicated to improve the codification of human rights protections.
- [The Human Trafficking Legal Center](#) represents trafficking survivors in the US who are in need of legal representation in criminal and civil cases. The Human Trafficking Legal Center referred me to an attorney when I had to testify against the State of Arizona and my trafficker.
- [Justice at Last](#) represents trafficking survivors in California, representing them in cases where they have been unjustly prosecuted by the state, revictimizing them further.
- [Reframe Health and Justice](#) is guided by the principles of healing-centered harm reduction in order to help organizations collaboratively build a world that values collective community care with autonomy and wellbeing. Reframe champions justice over punitive control, and abundance over survival.
- (now defunct) [St. James Infirmary](#) began with a call one morning from a sex worker who had just left court. She wanted to know if the blood draw she got in jail the night before was legal. It was not.
- [The National Survivor Network](#) is an organization that supports the professional development of trafficking survivors who support sex worker rights.
- [The Trevor Project](#) saved my life as a queer trafficking survivor. The Trevor Project is a hotline for 2SLGBTQ+ people who are at risk of suicide, or seeking help for other crises. The organization's work has grown more imperative as hateful rhetoric in the US has conflated and

misconstrued words like “grooming” and “trafficking” to stoke a moral panic that has led to exponentially deadly consequences.

**Positive examples of collaboration or coordination with the following entities in preventing contemporary forms of slavery and protecting vulnerable workers and victims:**

**a) Public Authorities:**

- i) In summer 2023, a campaign to address the monkeypox outbreak was launched in coordination with the LA Department of Public Health.

**b) Businesses/employers’ organizations:**

- i) The IWD 2022 & 2023 Events at MOCA Museum in downtown Los Angeles helped disseminate information about prevention services, harm reduction programs, sex worker safety programs, healthcare programs, and childcare services.

**c) Anti-slavery actors, human rights defenders and/or other civil society organizations :**

- i) SWSU includes survivors of human trafficking in our membership.
- ii) National Survivor Network is an organization of trafficking survivors who support sex worker rights.
- iii) Various human rights attorneys

**d) Other actors such as financial institutions, service providers, academia, media and regional/international organizations (e.g. ILO):**

- i) *In Academia:* Working with UNLV and their sexual entertainment and economies collection to raise awareness on the social impact of the sex worker economy on the social landscape of the American economy.
- ii) *With Financial Institutions:* FSC working with [CFPB](#) & attempting to align with other national worker orgs like RISE Economy to collaborate with federal regulators to help and banking and financial discrimination of populations already at risk for labor trafficking. Sabra Boyd (SWSU co-founder) helped urge CFPB to create a policy that helps trafficking survivors appeal to credit reporting agencies when they’ve had their identities stolen by traffickers. However more work is needed because the barriers are still too high, and it excludes protections for sex workers in similar situations.
- iii) *In Media:* The Irina Project has worked with the National Survivor Network and Sabra Boyd (SWSU co-founder) to educate reporters, editors, and journalism schools on how to ethically and accurately report on human trafficking issues, listen to survivor voices, and develop trauma-informed reporting and editing practices especially when commissioning trafficking survivor and sex worker writers.

All of these organizations are dedicated to preventing exploitation. Many explicitly serve workers in at-risk populations such as sex workers, 2SLGBTQ+ folks, gender nonconforming folks, people with disabilities, immigrant populations, etc.

Limitations include funding, lack of recognition, and the lack of a centralized workforce to unionize. Additionally, obstacles exist that prevent gig workers and freelancers from labor organizing in a meaningful way. We are also threatened by laws that deter the legal right to assist and support survivors and sex workers in meaningful, tangible ways that include housing, healthcare and reproductive rights, transportation, and monetary aid without risking imprisonment, unbanking and financial discrimination, and police violence.

Practical recommendations to governments include decriminalization of sex work so that people are able to financially support themselves without being forced into an artificial state-driven position of precarity and vulnerability that traffickers prey upon.