



Cyprus Women's Lobby

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PRESS RELEASE

The Cyprus Women's Lobby (CWL) expresses its deep concern at the policy measures taken by the Government in the fight against trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, particularly in relation to the entry visas for women to work in high risk establishments.

The CWL has been informed that despite the announcement by the Ministry of Interior regarding the abolition of 'artiste' visas on the 1st November 2008, the renewal of such visas have continued to take place, at least until recently. However, it is not known how and why these visas were renewed, neither has it been made public what the new procedures are and under what criteria new visas can be issued. In addition, it is not clear what body currently examines and evaluates applications for entry and residence permits for third country nationals who are 'creative and performing artists and supporting staff'. Finally, if such procedures exist, it has not been made public to what extent they are being implemented by the relevant authorities.

The Cyprus Women's Lobby wants to believe that the purpose of the new policy and the consequent abolition of the 'artiste' visa is the combating of the unacceptable phenomenon of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation and not simply a declaration made in order to silence and appease the unrelenting criticism and pressure that has been exercised on the Cyprus Government by NGOs, the media, as well as European and international organizations.

Unfortunately, however, the current practices of the relevant government authorities do nothing to convince us that the government is handling the issue of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation with the necessary urgency, political will, and requisite sense of responsibility. Trafficking in women is a violation of fundamental human rights and not simply a procedural matter or a question of appeasing the local and international criticism against Cyprus.

A resounding example of the current handling of the issue by the authorities is the recent case of attempted murder of a migrant woman from the Dominican Republic, who was a recognized victim of trafficking in human beings. To our great surprise the Government, within the framework of its efforts to 'reintegrate' victims of trafficking, granted this woman a permit to work as a domestic worker for a convicted rapist and murderer (of another woman) who later attempted to kill her! This action by the Government raises a number of questions that are directly linked to the rights of women-victims of human trafficking and the non-existence of state mechanisms for the protection, integration, and psychosocial support of victims as well as to the lack of control mechanisms and proper criteria for the granting of employment permits to women third-country nationals.

The answers to these questions as well as the disclosure of the procedures, criteria, and regulations for the implementation of the new policy on the issuing of entry permits for creative artists and performers from third-countries will be indicative of the policy and practice of the government but also of its real intentions on the critical issue of combating trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. In the 21st century and as a member of the European Union, the urgent need for transparent procedures

both in decision-making stage and the implementation stage, as well as the continued consultation and cooperation with NGOs on issues such as trafficking in women is self-evident.

It should be noted that the Cyprus Women's Lobby welcomes and agrees with the new policy and the abolition of the 'artiste' visa but at the same time retains reservations because we believe that it does not give comprehensive solutions to the issue of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. In our view, the combating of trafficking in women cannot succeed with isolated and sporadic measures such as this. The complexity and dimensions of the problem demands a holistic and comprehensive approach with specific policy measures and procedures. The most important factors that need to be taken into account in formulating such a policy are the criminal networks for trafficking women and girls, the continued operation of high risk establishments, the demand for sexual services, the complete ignorance of the public regarding the conditions of exploitation these women live under and, finally, the critical question of inequality between women and men which underlies the treatment that they subjected to and the violation of their human rights.

To this day, the existing laws, policies, and measures in Cyprus in relation to the issue of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation do not incorporate a gender perspective, even though women make up the overwhelming majority of victims. With regard to the issue of demand for sexual services and how this sustains trafficking in women, the Government has not made any effort to reduce such demand through the sensitization of those that buy sexual services. It should be noted that Cyprus has signed and ratified the Council of Europe Convention for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, which refers specifically to measures to combat demand for sexual services and the promotion of gender equality in two separate articles (6 and 17 respectively).

The Cyprus Women's Lobby calls on the Government to:

- Immediately disclose the procedures, criteria and regulations for the implementation of the new policy on the issuing of entry permits for creative artists and performers from third-countries.
- Proceed directly with the implementation of the new policy that was announced in November 2008 with regard to the entry, employment, and residence of creative artists and performers and supporting staff from third-countries;
- Urgently review the policy for the entry and employment of migrant women third country nationals that work in establishments considered high risk for trafficking and sexual exploitation.
- Proceed with the formulation of a comprehensive policy package for combating trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, taking into account all the dimensions and factors that support trafficking, incorporating a gender perspective and aiming at the sensitization of all relevant stakeholders, social partners, and society at large.

* The **Cyprus Women's Lobby** is an umbrella network of 16 women's organizations and NGOs, and is a full member of the European Women's Lobby (EWL), the largest non-governmental women's organisations in the European Union, representing approximately 2000 organisations in 30 European Countries. Working with its members at national and European levels, the EWL's main objective is to fight for gender equality and to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in all EU policy areas.