

## A MANDATE FOR LEGALIZING PROSTITUTION: DELHI TIMES: DATED: 25<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2003

I have been reading with extremely keen and concerned interest all your articles on the subject being published as Human Rights stories. The conclusion drawn appears to be based on the opinions expressed by either those who have little knowledge of the ground realities mostly because they are an unconcerned lot, or they happen to be such organisations who have vested interest in the trade, albeit unknowingly. As a serving policeman for nearly 3 decades with all sensitivity and raw experience at my command, and as the founder Secretary of Prayas which has looked after thousands of sexually exploited girls during the past 15 years, I have a point of view.

While giving the so-called 'Mandate for Legalizing Prostitution', the opinion makers seem to be oblivious to the fact that prostitution, more appropriately, 'Commercial Sex Trade', is universally recognized as one of the three largest, perhaps the most demeaning and dehumanizing illicit business in the world along with the Narcotic drugs and the Arms. This 7 billion dollar trade directly involving millions particularly in the SAARC region of India, Bangladesh and Nepal, mostly thrives on the poor and exploited women and children under severe socio-economic compulsions. Do we propose to legalize all concomitant crimes, trafficking in women and children being the fountainhead and the children forming more than 25% of the victims? Very few countries have thought of giving some kind of legal sanction to the women in trade, none of them has actually legalized the trade as such. A poor, developing country like India with hundreds of million helplessly looking for some social defense and security from an indifferent civil society and Governance can't afford such outlandish ideas. Let's kill in stead of promoting them.

Unfortunately, many spirited individuals and organisations have willy-nilly developed some myopic interest in the activities relating to prostitution and they are unable to look beyond their areas of interest. Those working with the so-called rights of such women, even children, do not appreciate that the victims are driven out of their native homes having burnt their bridges under extremely compelling situations on which they had no control. Practically no efforts have been made to create worthwhile programs in the country for their protection, care and rehabilitation despite an excellent National Plan of Action drawn up in 1998. Very few voluntary organisations have actually created projects and programs on the ground to look after the victims. Many of those working on HIV/AIDS seem to believe that all solutions must be found within the limits of the red light areas or the situations where the trade goes on, least realizing that the conditions that obtain at these places are sub-human and we have no business to let them continue for 'them alone'. In the process, in stead of liberating the victims from these living hells they end up creating permanent homes for them.

**Amod K. Kanth**