

# ASWA NEWSLETTER

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## Condemning the UN Special Rapporteur's Report on Sex Work: A Human Rights Perspective

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Kamau argues that the report misrepresents the rights of sex workers, undermining their agency and autonomy, and framing their rights solely as women's and human rights issue without recognizing the full complexity of their situation.

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# Condemning the UN Special Rapporteur's Report on Sex Work: A Human Rights Perspective

Grace Kamau, Regional Coordinator for the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA), has strongly criticized the recent report by Reem Alsalem, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls.

Kamau argues that the report misrepresents the rights of sex workers, undermining their agency and autonomy, and framing their rights solely as women's and human rights issue without recognizing the full complexity of their situation.

Kamau further contends that the report conflates sex work with trafficking and sexual exploitation, which diverts attention from the real human rights challenges that sex workers face.

Terms like 'exploitation of prostitution' in international law should not be interpreted as referring to sex work in its entirety, as the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and the CEDAW convention draw clear distinctions between exploitation, trafficking, and sex work. By blending these terms, the report fails to advocate for the full range of human rights that sex workers deserve.

*"Conflating these issues impedes our ability to properly address the needs of sex workers, especially in cases of exploitation and trafficking," Kamau asserted, calling for a more accurate representation of sex work as part of the broader fight for human rights.*

## Spotlight on Collaboration: Frontline AIDS Leadership Engages with ASWA and SWOP Ambassadors



This quarter, ASWA had the honor of hosting Frontline AIDS' new Executive Director, John Plastow.

Our Regional Coordinator, Grace Kamau, introduced him to ASWA's vital work in amplifying the voices of sex workers across Africa and advocating for their dignity and rights.

Plastow also visited SWOP Ambassadors, where their Executive Director, Rosemary Kasiba, led a powerful session on their violence response initiatives.



A field visit to Majengo in Nairobi provided Plastow with firsthand insight into the profound impact of violence on female sex workers and the urgent human rights challenges they face.

Plastow's support of ASWA's mission underscores the global solidarity needed to ensure sex workers' rights are recognized and respected.

# AIDS 2024: Breaking the Stigma – How Criminalization Blocks Access to HIV Services



At the AIDS 2024 Conference in Munich, ASWA hosted a powerful session in the Global Village titled *Impact of Criminalization on Utilization of HIV Services*.

Led by Grace Nyarath, the session gathered experts, advocates, and those directly impacted to shed light on the harsh realities faced by sex workers, people who use drugs, and LGBTQ+ communities.

Criminalization, the session revealed, not only fuels stigma but also prevents many from accessing vital HIV services, further widening health disparities.

Throughout the discussion, panelists underscored that criminalization creates barriers to disclosure and care.

Fear of legal consequences deters people from seeking testing and treatment, trapping many in cycles of untreated illness and isolation. This reality is not new—years of lived experiences have demonstrated the harm caused by criminalization. The discussion urged that rather than more studies, what is needed is immediate action to protect those at risk and reduce health inequities.

The session also highlighted a worrying trend: well-organized, anti-rights movements are increasingly targeting vulnerable populations. Despite the dedication and resilience of sex worker-led advocacy, these movements have significant financial resources, making it hard for sex worker-led initiatives to compete. With proper funding and support, however, these movements can build their capacity to counteract anti-rights narratives and advance decriminalization.

ASWA's session emphasized the need to recognize sex work as a valid form of labor, meriting protection and labor rights. By creating alliances with groups genuinely committed to sex worker rights, advocates hope to increase visibility and policy change. Past experiences, however, have shown that not all allies are steadfast, underscoring the need for strong, reliable partnerships.

The conclusion was clear: Decriminalization is essential to advancing the health and human rights of sex workers.

This session was a powerful reminder of the role funders and allies play in supporting sex worker-led movements.

The call to action was resolute: prioritize inclusion, empowerment, and decriminalization, with communities leading initiatives that affect their lives.

***Only by putting people first can we break the barriers that stigma and criminalization have built, ensuring a future where health equity is a right, not a privilege.***

**Impact of criminalization on HIV services uptake.**

- Wed, 24 July
- 1400-1500 hrs CEST
- Global Village

<b>Our Panelists</b>	 <b>Liz Onyango</b> Program Officer COSWA Kenya	 <b>Jules Kim</b> Global Coordinator NSWP
	 <b>Grace Nyarath</b> Moderator	 <b>Kholi Bhuthelezi</b> Coordinator SISONKE South Africa

 **AIDS 2024**  
22-26 July  
Munich and virtual

**#PutPeopleFirst**





## Advancing Advocacy: Building Capacity for SRHR and HIV Integration

This quarter, ASWA's Program Officer, Grace Nyarath, participated in a vital advocacy training in Nairobi, led by Frontline AIDS and WACI Health.

The training aimed to enhance the capacity of community-led organizations to advocate for the integration of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and HIV services into Universal Health Coverage (UHC) policies.

Nyarath is committed to using her newly acquired skills to ensure that sex workers can access the quality healthcare they deserve, regardless of their background.

ASWA is working to ensure that SRHR and HIV services are part of UHC, which is critical for advancing the human right to health for all, especially marginalized communities.

## Exciting Partnership: ASWA Hosts APNSW for the Sex Worker Academy Exchange

This quarter, ASWA was privileged to host the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) for a week-long exchange focused on our Sex Worker Academy.

This initiative was designed to foster the integration of human rights principles into the work of sex worker organizations, with an emphasis on empowerment, education, and capacity-building.

The exchange included sharing valuable insights into planning and implementing a Sex Worker Academy, with enriching site visits at Hoymas Kenya and SWOP Ambassadors.

APNSW's enthusiasm and commitment to advancing sex workers' rights will have a lasting impact in Asia, fostering global solidarity and promoting the rights of sex workers as fundamental human rights.





## Strengthening Foundations: FON Team Visits ASWA for Systems Support

We were delighted to welcome the Feminist Opportunities Now (FON) team to our ASWA office this quarter.

The visit focused on systems strengthening, a critical step in ensuring that ASWA can continue to uplift and empower sex workers across Africa effectively.

With FON's support, we are building a more resilient and sustainable future for those we serve, reinforcing our commitment to the human rights and dignity of sex workers.



## Celebrating Strength and Solidarity with Ready Movement Zimbabwe

This quarter, we celebrate the empowering work of our member, Ready Movement Zimbabwe, who commemorated Sex Worker Pride Day with impactful activities aimed at fostering empowerment and building resilience.

The event provided a platform for sharing experiences, strengthening confidence in assertiveness, and developing essential life skills such as safe sex practices, self-care, and negotiation skills.

We are proud of Ready Movement Zimbabwe's commitment to promoting sex worker pride and human rights, as it reflects the strength and solidarity that our community stands for.

# Celebrating Strength and Solidarity: Empowering Sex Workers through SWAA Academy

## Kondwani Chapola: Advocacy for Male Sex Workers' Rights



After attending the ASWA Sex Workers Academy (SWAA) in 2019, I became stronger and more confident in advocating for Male Sex Workers' rights as fundamental human rights.

The training provided me with the knowledge and skills to represent our community at different meetings and events, ensuring that our voices are not just heard but respected.

One of the most valuable experiences I gained from the Academy was the opportunity to network with other sex workers from across the globe.

This built a global support network, reinforcing the belief that human rights are universal and cannot be denied to any person, regardless of their profession.

Before the training, many male sex workers were unaware of their rights, and many were left vulnerable to human rights violations such as gender-based violence and discrimination.

I have worked tirelessly to educate male sex workers about their rights, emphasizing that as sex workers, we are entitled to the same rights as everyone else, including the right to access healthcare, report violence, and receive necessary care. It is a matter of dignity and equality.

Through my work with Community Health Rights Advocacy (CHeRA), I have been able to directly support male sex workers in accessing health services and reporting violence.

This has not only encouraged many to come forward but also empowered them to take ownership of their rights. It is a critical step towards creating a society where the human rights of all individuals, regardless of their occupation, are recognized and protected.

# Celebrating Strength and Solidarity: Empowering Sex Workers through SWAA Academy

## Dameless Dzingomvera: Empowering Female Sex Workers

After attending the ASWA Sex Workers Academy (SWAA), I learned that, as sex workers, we can advocate for ourselves and demand better treatment.

The journey of advocacy has not been easy, especially for female sex workers who often face societal stigma and are regarded as a threat to the institution of marriage and family.

However, this discrimination is a violation of our human rights. It is a direct attack on our dignity, our right to be treated with respect, and our right to live without fear of violence and marginalization.

Despite these challenges, I have experienced some significant breakthroughs. I was privileged to represent sex workers in the national proposal writing for Malaria, TB, and HIV programs.

This opportunity was a step forward in ensuring that sex workers' issues are addressed in national health policies and that we are included in decision-making processes that directly affect our lives. Including our concerns in the national budget is an acknowledgment of our rights to access healthcare and services.

Although we were not successful as sub-recipients in the Global Fund, this experience has paved the way for future success. Sex worker organizations are now poised to take a central role in implementing health programs alongside organizations that were successful in securing funding.

This is a victory for the recognition of sex workers' rights to be full participants in the development of health policies and programs that affect us. It is proof that, when we demand our human rights, change is possible.



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