

ONE WAY TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Calls to legalise sex work

JANA-MARI SMITH
Prostitutes need legal protection to be able to report trafficking and abuse to authorities, something not within our legal framework.



LEGALISE: Windhoek prostitutes being interrogated by members of the Namibian police during an operation in the city. PHOTO: NAMPA

Calls to decriminalise prostitution in Namibia in the past mostly focused on improving access to health and safety for sex workers, but human trafficking advocates in the United States believe that decriminalising prostitution could help expose the true extent of sex trafficking ongoing in the country.

Those working with sex trafficking survivors argue that many victims are reluctant to come forward and report their situation for various reasons, including abuse at the hands of the police and other authorities. "We believe that ending sex trafficking starts with decriminalising sex work so that people engaged in sex work can come forward safely to report abuses against them," Jean Bruggeman, the executive direc-

tor of the Freedom Network in the United States said at a press briefing in Washington, DC recently.

She said that decriminalising sex work and training law enforcement and other service providers in focusing on a human rights approach instead of punishing victims, would be key to exposing sex trafficking in countries. "You will see more reports of abuse and exploitation. When you make it more dangerous and harder for people to come forward, then they won't come forward and you

won't see it. We firmly believe that by decriminalising sex work, those who have experienced abuse and exploitation can come forward and receive services." Bruggeman warned that arrests are traumatic in themselves and would reduce the opportunity for



END TRAFFICKING: Decriminalising prostitution could be key to helping victims come forward to report exploitation, argue lawyers Jean Bruggeman, left, and Martina Vandenberg. PHOTO: JANA-MARI SMITH

possible victims of sex trafficking to reach out for help. "When someone comes at you gun-strong, and puts handcuffs on you, you are unlikely to talk about the victimisation that you faced and the circumstances around that." She added that apart from legal changes, countries would then have to take practical steps, including training of law enforcement to be able to handle cases of abuse and exploitation sensitively and to strengthen social safety nets.

"Law enforcement would have to respect the reports of abuse and exploitation they receive from workers in sex industries, which is not universal at this time." In Namibia, several human rights and civil organisations have recommended that provisions relating to sex work in Namibia should be set aside, pointing out that the stigma, discrimination and violence frequently experienced by sex workers discourages them from accessing public services, including health care and law enforcement. Testimony from sex workers to a United Nations Special Rapporteur in 2013 alleged by sex workers recurring police abuse, including high levels of violence at the hands of police including rape, arbitrary detentions and confiscation of condoms.

A conversation is needed
Human trafficking, which can involve labour or sex exploitation, is defined as a form of modern-day slavery and involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain services for commercial or other gains through exploitation. In Namibia, the 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) issued by the United States Office to monitor and combat trafficking, identified cases of both labour and sex trafficking in the country, including the exploitation of children and women in the sex industry. Martina Vandenberg, the founder and president of the Human Trafficking Centre in the United States, explained that in the United States, an increasing trend is the recognition that children under the age of 18 cannot consent to sex work.

Don't punish the sellers
Bruggeman explained that the Freedom Network advocates for decriminalising prostitution, which would remove the penalties for engaging in prostitution. She said that worldwide different models have been implemented; including legalising prostitution, which is a model that puts in place regulations pertaining to sex work. "I would not venture to suggest that any one model is appropriate worldwide," she said, noting that countries would have to consider their cultural and legal frameworks, among other things. Critical though, is that sex workers feel safe to approach authorities and service providers for help. "When workers continue to be arrested for engaging in sex work, it puts them at great risk of all sorts of harm," she said. She added that punishing sex work increases the risk of sex trafficking and other forms of exploitation and abuse.

She said that moreover, once a person has a criminal record, it could rob them of future opportunities. "As a human rights-based organisation, we believe in expanding people's options, and their ability to make their own decisions. So if they want to be involved in sex work they can do so safely. If they want to be engaged in other

forms of labour, they can do so safely." She said the network believes that if these goals are reached, sex trafficking will be reduced to a great extent, but not completely. "We have not eliminated any form of crime in this country. So I don't expect we will be able to eliminate this form of crime anytime soon. What we can do is to make conditions safer for people so that they are less likely to suffer harm and abuse and that when they do they are more likely to come forward and access services and protection." ***Namibian Sun journalist Jana-Mari Smith is in the United States on invitation by the US Department of State's Foreign Press Centre. She has joined 19 other journalists from around the world to take part in an international reporting tour to create awareness and gain insight into combating human trafficking through prevention, protection and prosecution.**

Many learners still not placed

NAMPA
The educational directorate for the Khomas Region has managed to place 354 learners who failed to meet the admission requirements for Grade 11 last year. This comes after an outcry by some parents who complained that their children are too young to be out of school. The education minister, Katrina Hanse-Himarwa, made it clear during the announcement of the Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) national examination results in

November last year that Grade 10 failures who are 17 and younger would only be allowed to repeat if there was space at schools. About 18 137 full-time Grade 10 candidates throughout the country failed. The region's deputy director for programmes and quality assurance, Paulus Lewin, told *Nam-pa* there were limited spaces in schools for Grade 10 repeaters, and those who have been placed are very fortunate. He said it was unfortunate that learners were faced with this challenge, but "they have only themselves to blame for a lack of commitment to their school work". Lewin said it was impossible to take back all the learners because

schools simply did not have the resources, including teaching staff, to accommodate them. "I however advise parents to stop wasting time at schools and rather send their children to register at Namibian College of Open Learning (Namcol) and other accredited private institutions, where they can re-do two or three subjects instead of all nine subjects," Lewis added. Registration for Namcol ends on 7 February. The Khomas Region is also experiencing a lack space for roughly 450 prospective Grade 1 learners and 473 Grade 8 learners. "We are planning to identify some schools to set up tents and evenly distribute these learners as we are running out of time," Lewin said.



SHORTAGE: Besides a lack of space for Grade 10 pupils, there are still Grade 1 and 8 learners who have not been enrolled in the Khomas Region. PHOTO: TUNDOLE MUNGIBA

Millions to fight Hepatitis E outbreak

ELLANIE SMIT
The City of Windhoek will spend N\$32 million in an effort to combat the outbreak of Hepatitis E that has affected close to 500 people in the capital's informal settlements.

ab. Additional municipal water points will also be provided in the affected areas. In an update about the outbreak, the health ministry last week said that there were 490 cases of Hepatitis E that have been reported. Out of these, 166 people tested positive. Another 308 epidemiological cases were reported in households where infected people lived. There were still 119 suspected cases with pending laboratory results at that stage. Statistics indicated that the number of suspected cases among females was 212, while among males the number was 228. The most affected age group the ministry said was the 20- to 39-year-old category. Furthermore, the Havana informal settlement is the most affected with 249 cases reported. This is due to a lack of toilets and potable water in the settlement.



OUTBREAK: Hepatitis E can be prevented through clean drinking water and sanitation is important. PHOTO: FILE

Meanwhile, the ministry of health has also allocated N\$3.7 million to contain the outbreak, while the Khomas Regional Council has committed N\$2 million and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) donated more than N\$724 000 to fighting the disease. The health ministry also investigated the water sources of people living in infected areas and found that 92% of residents get their water from communal taps. Water samples were also taken from the communal taps and were found to be "reasonably clean". The containers used to

collect water were also checked and it was found that 51% of people have open containers while 49% have closed containers. However, it was worrisome to find that in 55% of the containers used for water there was some indication of faecal matter. Hepatitis E is a waterborne dis-

ease that can be prevented through good sanitation and the availability of clean drinking water. Clean drinking water and sanitation, including frequent hand washing, are crucial in containing the rate of infection. The virus is transmitted via the faecal-oral route, principally

via contaminated drinking water, and the disease is most common in areas with limited access to water, sanitation, weak hygiene and health services. Symptoms include jaundice, fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, dark urine, pale-coloured stool, joint pain, nausea and vomiting.

Over 70 learners drop out of Minna Sachs

NAMPA
More than 70 learners dropped out of Minna Sachs Primary School in the Tseiblaagte residential area of Keetmanshoop in 2017. This statistic was provided to parents at a recent school meeting. School authorities urged parents to encourage their children to take education seriously and to remain in school for as long as possible. A parent who spoke to *Nampa* said it was shocking that learners "in this day and age" drop out during the primary school phase. "We heard how teachers would go to the houses of the learners who failed to ask them to attend

school, only to be told that they would not return," the parent said. Principal Richard Namaseb said most of those who dropped out were in the upper-primary phase. "Learners dropping out is a common thing at Minna Sachs; it has been happening for years," Namaseb said. He said the main reason was that parents had no control over their children. "Many of these learners come from single-parent homes and there is a problem with control at home," said the principal. Alcohol abuse in the home and community was another factor highlighted by Namaseb, in addition to some learners living with their grandparents.

"The elders are old and weak and cannot walk the learners to and from school," he said. In some instances, families relocate to other towns or villages and move learners without informing the school. The principal said the parents of some learners who had dropped out last year were now demanding that their children be taken back. "The government wants young learners back in school too," Namaseb said. Constance Wantenaar, the education inspector of the Kalahari circuit under which Minna Sachs falls, said she was unaware of the situation at the school when approached for comment.



LEAVING: Minna Sachs, a primary school in Tseiblaagte, has a high dropout rate. PHOTO: NAMPA



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