

## Prostitution Review – A Briefing from the Christian Institute

The Government is currently consulting on a new strategy to deal with prostitution and its harmful social consequences, arguing existing legislation is “outdated, confusing and ineffective”.<sup>1</sup> The Government is rightly concerned to aim to limit exploitation through prostitution. However, it is consulting on alarming and radical legal reform. It suggests possible ways of tolerating prostitution. This would make the situation very much worse, not better. Tolerating prostitution means tolerating what is inherently exploitative and wrong.

### **Key Concerns**

The most worrying part of the consultation paper is chapter 9. This considers whether prostitution should be legalised or decriminalised and asks the following questions:<sup>2</sup>

- **Q32. “Should our response to street-based prostitution involving adults accept or challenge its existence?”**

Under no circumstances should prostitution be accepted. Prostitution is intrinsically wrong and, as with other harmful vices such as drugs, must be prohibited by law. Any policy that directly or indirectly accepts the existence of prostitution will both normalise and give legitimacy to an activity that exploits, abuses and degrades women. Prostitution should be challenged through a ‘zero tolerance’ approach.

- **Q33. “Is there a case for designating managed areas at a local level?...”**

No. Managed areas, otherwise known as ‘tolerance zones’, are indefensible, unworkable and unsuccessful. Whilst intended to provide protection and regulation, they fail to prevent exploitation and instead permit the abuse to continue. Thus the Association of Chief Police Officers<sup>3</sup> and local councils, including Birmingham<sup>4</sup> and Derby<sup>5</sup> are strongly opposed to tolerance zones. Instead they advocate a policy of zero tolerance. Significantly, in 2003, the Scottish Parliament heavily rejected proposals for tolerance zones, following strong opposition from police and councils across Scotland.<sup>6</sup>

- **Q34. “Is it acceptable for sex to be sold from private premises? If so, what safeguards should be put in place?”**

No. Brothels are never acceptable. The Association of Chief Police Officers is opposed to legalised brothels, stating “[licensed brothels] continue to permit the abuse and exploitation of women”.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, allowing legalised brothels would escalate rather than ‘control’ prostitution. In the four years following the legalisation of brothels in Sydney, Australia, in 1995, the number of brothels more than tripled.<sup>8</sup> Australia also shows how the existence of legal brothels does not reduce the problem of street prostitution.<sup>9</sup>

- **Q35. “Would registration help safeguard public health?”**

No. Since up to 95% of street prostitutes are believed to use ‘heroin and/or crack’,<sup>10</sup> then how could someone with an addiction pass any genuine health criteria, or be willing to come forward to register? Countries that have adopted such schemes have ended up with a two-tier system of registered and unregistered prostitutes, with those unregistered having very little access to healthcare.<sup>11</sup> Besides, promiscuity is inherently unhealthy. As with taking illegal drugs, it can never be healthy.

### **What should be done?**

The state must not condone prostitution. It should ensure that activities associated with prostitution are firmly prosecuted as criminal offences, whilst ensuring that there is proper help and support for prostitutes wanting to leave a life of vice.

This can be achieved by:

- Maintaining and enforcing the existing laws against prostitution.
- Increasing penalties for ‘kerb crawlers’, ‘pimps’ and for those who advertise prostitution.

- Strengthening police resources and prioritising fighting prostitution.
- Increasing funding for organisations that seek to help women *leave* prostitution.

### **What the Bible Says**

The Bible is clear that the only acceptable context for sexual activity is within marriage.<sup>12</sup> Adultery is forbidden in the Ten Commandments.<sup>13</sup> Jesus explains the breadth of this: "...anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."<sup>14</sup>

The Bible explicitly condemns prostitution as degrading and wicked: "Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness."<sup>15</sup> Parents and the state have a duty to protect vulnerable girls.

### **Conclusion**

Prostitution, by its very nature, is harmful and degrading to women. It is inextricably linked to drug abuse, exploitation and violence. The state should not condone or facilitate prostitution in any way. The evidence of legalisation abroad, such as in Australia, clearly shows that such an approach leads to a proliferation of prostitution, whilst doing little to protect those involved.

Our present laws owe much to the courage and compassion of Josephine Butler. She opened up her home to sick and dying prostitutes. The Home Secretary has commended her as an example of the compassion that he wishes to emulate. But David Blunkett should realise that her great compassion led her to fight against tolerance laws, not to support them. In 1883, after Josephine Butler's 19-year national campaign, Parliament overturned the Victorian tolerance zones which legalised prostitution. We must not turn the clock back to 1864.

The Christian Institute  
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<sup>1</sup> *Paying the Price: A Consultation Paper on Prostitution*, Home Office, July 2004, page 5  
<sup>2</sup> *Paying the Price: A Consultation Paper on Prostitution*, Home Office, July 2004, page 87, questions 32 -35  
<sup>3</sup> Association of Chief Police Officers, Press Release, *ACPO Respond to Home Office Consultation Paper on Prostitution*, 16 July 2004  
<sup>4</sup> Birmingham City Council, Press Release, *Birmingham City Council Responds to Government Paper on Prostitution*, 9 November 2004; *Birmingham Post*, 8 November 2004; *Evening Mail*, 16 November 2004  
<sup>5</sup> *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 3 November 2004  
<sup>6</sup> *The Herald*, 28 February 2003; see also Prostitution Tolerance Zones (Scotland) Bill, SPICe Briefing, 02/138, 2002, page 12; see also <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/2017413.stm> as at 16 November 2004  
<sup>7</sup> Association of Chief Police Officers, Press Release, *ACPO Respond to Home Office Consultation Paper on Prostitution*, 16 July 2004  
<sup>8</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 August 1999  
<sup>9</sup> *The Age*, 2 March 1999 (Australian newspaper affiliated with the *Sydney Morning Herald*)  
<sup>10</sup> *Paying the Price: A Consultation Paper on Prostitution*, Home Office, July 2004, page 11  
<sup>11</sup> *Paying the Price: A Consultation Paper on Prostitution*, Home Office, July 2004, page 87  
<sup>12</sup> Genesis 2:24, the Apostle Paul quotes this verse in his denunciation of prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:15-20  
<sup>13</sup> Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18  
<sup>14</sup> Matthew 5:27-28  
<sup>15</sup> Leviticus 19:29