

Soon-Young Yoon  
Chair  
NGO Committee on the Status of Women

10 March 2015

Dear Ms. Yoon,

We are writing as women's rights activists, organisations and donors who annually participate in the UN Commission on the Status of Women. We are looking forward to working hard in preparation for the 59th session where we will celebrate the Beijing Platform for Action, still the most comprehensive framework on women's human rights and gender equality, and plan for the future work under the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

We are dismayed that the NGO Committee on the Status of Women has decided to give this year's Woman of Distinction award to Ruchira Gupta whose work and politics fails to recognize the agency and rights of all women. As a result of this selection, many women who currently engage or have previously engaged in sex work will feel unwelcome at best, and targeted or unsafe at worst, to participate in the Consultation Day.

There are also many women who, as allies to sex workers, will not feel comfortable or able to join the day knowing their sisters face increased risk as a direct result of Ruchira's work. It is well documented that the paternalistic raid, rescue and rehabilitation approach results in rights violations against women engaged in sex work, including involuntary detention. This approach, which is touted by Ruchira and others as a viable solution, does nothing to end trafficking in persons and disrupts access to life-saving health services and care.

During this year's CSW, we will mark the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, review its implementation and plan for the next 15 years of this work under the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Given that one of the criteria for the award is "An advocate and public speaker who can address the year's priority theme of the CSW", we would have hoped that the Committee would have sought to celebrate a women's rights activist who recognizes and promotes the rights and dignity of all women.

We thank the NGO Committee on the Status of Women for its ongoing and critical work to support *all* civil society groups advancing the rights of women and girls at the CSW. We hope that you are able to provide us with a public explanation for this controversial decision so that we may look forward to continuing effective and collaborative relationships.

In solidarity,

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights  
African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA)  
AIDS Accountability International (AAI)  
American Jewish World Service (AJWS)  
ARROW - Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women  
Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice  
Best Practices Policy Project (BPPP)  
COC Netherlands

CREA

Fundación Arcoiris

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), International Secretariat

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)

International La Strada Association

International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)

Mama Cash

Open Society Foundations

Red Umbrella Fund

Rev. Patricia Ackerman NY, NY

RFSL - Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer Rights

Sex Workers Project

S.H.E. social, health and empowerment feminist collective of transgender and intersex

women of Africa

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights

CC: UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP, UNAIDS