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**PRESS RELEASE**

PREVENTION

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## POLICY ON PROSTITUTION : THE NATIONAL AIDS COUNCIL ONCE AGAIN ADVOCATES RISK REDUCTION AS A TOP PRIORITY

The National AIDS Council is closely observing the evolution of the public debate on prostitution. While the public authorities are toughening their attitude, the Council advocates policy based on information for the general public and HIV risk reduction. It is therefore vital for associations to continue their prevention work.

Over the past ten years, prostitution modalities have changed, particularly owing to the growing implication of transnational organized crime networks. The precariousness that characterizes sex workers' condition is increasing and makes them more vulnerable to pimps who can force them into risky behaviours so as to satisfy customers. Current policy contributes to greater isolation.

In such a situation, associations' prevention programmes cannot ensure the same level of efficiency as before. The Council is concerned that the current relapse in prevention behaviours will increase the risk of a new outbreak of AIDS. If or when associations lose touch with sex workers, information levels and awareness of AIDS and STD risks will decline.

The Council once again emphasizes that any policy on prostitution must take into account sex workers' health ; policy must be part of a true risk reduction strategy. In terms of public health, it is therefore necessary to support the ground roots work of those associations that fight for sex workers' rights so as to combat the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic amongst sex workers, their clients and persons related to them. Furthermore, the Council suggests that associations adapt their programmes to changes in the socio-economic environment of prostitution. Last, the Council stresses that policy on prostitution must first and foremost be a policy against the trafficking of human beings and that only European and international coordination can make it effective.