

To: The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO)

Re: Study of Human Trafficking in Canada

From: Professor Kamala Kempadoo, York University

Date: April 19, 2023

It has come to my attention that there is a motion in the House of Commons to undertake a new study of human trafficking in Canada. As a Black and migrant feminist, professor, and researcher in the field of sex work and anti-trafficking studies for over three decades, this motion comes as a surprise.

The conditions, causes and problems that have been identified as human trafficking have long been established in Canada and globally, and it is evident from research that much of the legal and policy initiatives harm rather than help sex workers, migrant workers and racialized and Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people. For example, the conflation of sex work, human trafficking, and exploitation leads to anti-trafficking policies and practices that increase sex workers' vulnerability to violence, isolation, and marginalization. Moreover, trafficking "detection" tools used by police, health and social service providers and customer service providers conflate signs of trafficking with signs of stigmatization, illegalized immigration status and sex work, which leads to migrant sex workers isolating themselves from these services to avoid invasive and potentially harmful questions and disclosures. As well, it is evident that increased funding of human trafficking studies, programs, and enforcement has resulted in more policing and more exit-based programs that further isolate and do not address the needs of sex workers, migrant workers, or migrant sex workers. *In other words, "collateral damage" that arises from anti-trafficking policies and interventions is very real, and harms vulnerable people.*

Please find [here](#) the Policy Brief *Challenging Trafficking in Canada*, published by York University in 2017, which reviews the key studies on Canada and documents the knowledge we had about trafficking at the time. Since then, many more studies have been made and the insights, evidence, and knowledge presented in the Brief have been deepened and expanded.

Rather than repeat what is already known and waste funds on yet another study, FEWO would do well to take up the information and recommendations in the numerous studies available to it, and consult with sex workers, migrant workers, and racialized and Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people

to better channel the support that is needed to combat the harms they face today. These are, after all, the people who deal with the effects of human trafficking interventions, and their needs should be heard and be taken seriously into consideration in any future policy, law-enforcement and social work initiatives.

FEWO would also do well to heed the following recommendations:

- 1. Remove criminal, immigration, and municipal laws and regulations that target sex work and sex workers;**
- 2. Immediately ensure full and permanent immigration status for all in Canada, without exception; and provide everyone with *access without fear* to services;**
- 3. Reframe funding initiatives so that they are not dependent on “human trafficking” frameworks, including the recognition of sex work as work;**
- 4. Invest funds in sex worker-led community initiatives, especially Indigenous, Black, and migrant sex worker led groups.**

Kamala Kempadoo is Professor Emerita of the Department of Social Science at York University in Toronto, Canada. Her expertise includes sex worker and critical antitrafficking studies, Caribbean, Black and transnational feminisms, and Black Radical Thought. She has published extensively on the Caribbean sex trade and global anti-trafficking discourses including: *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance and Redefinition* (Routledge 1998) and *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work, and Human Rights* (Paradigm 2005/2012). Most recently, she is co-editor with Elena Shih of *White Supremacy, Racism and the Coloniality of Anti-Trafficking* (Routledge 2022). She is the recipient of the 2017 Distinguished Scientific Award of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality and the 2018 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Caribbean Studies Association.

Reference:

Kempadoo, K., McFayden, N., Pilon, P., Sterling, A., & MacKenzie, A. (2017). [\*Policy brief: Challenging trafficking in Canada\*](#). Toronto: Centre for Feminist Research, York University.