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UN Concern About Prostitution In Cuba

Committee notes detention used to “re-educate” sex workers.

By Yaremis Flores Marín - Latin America
21 Aug 13

The treatment of sex workers in Cuba, including confinement for the purpose of “re-education”, was raised by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women when it discussed the country’s record last month.

In a report on its findings released on July 25, the Geneva-based committee said it was “deeply concerned” about Cuba’s reluctance to address the issue of prostitution, and noted the “re-education” of women involved in prostitution without clear and transparent objectives and procedures, as well as... the lack of information about the number and conditions of women in detention”.

The committee, set up to monitor how countries are implementing the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Like other signatories to the convention, Cuba is legally bound to put its provisions into practice and to submit reports on progress at least every four years.

The UN body reviewed Cuba’s case on July 9, and published its report two weeks later. (See [Cuban Lawyers Highlight Domestic Violence](#) on other aspects of the meeting.)

Its recommendations included calls for guaranteed access to justice, free legal assistance programmes, protection for victims of violence, and mandatory training for judges, prosecutors, police, healthcare and education professionals and journalists on matters of violence against women.

Committee members expressed concern at the dearth of statistics on sex workers and trafficking, and the lack of efforts to address and prevent the causes of prostitution.

While soliciting is not a criminal offence in Cuba, the government “has a clear policy of not tolerating prostitution”, the committee noted. The government “imposes security measures aimed at re-educating women who show anti-social behaviour and engage in prostitution, such as confinement in a rehabilitation centre”.

The committee asked the Cuban authorities for further information on how “anti-social behaviour” was defined, and how the “re-education” process was regulated.

As for trafficked sex workers, the report said that state policy should ensure “the rehabilitation and social integration of victims, including by providing them with shelter and assistance”.

Putting the government’s case at the CEDAW committee meeting on July 9, the deputy head of Cuba’s supreme court, Olga Lidia Jones Morrison, said that 660 women over the age of 18 were detained for working as prostitutes in 2011. She did not give more recent figures, or say how many underage girls were detained or whether they were jailed.

Speaking at a press conference after the UN report was released, Cuban justice minister María Esther Reus González described the document as “productive”.

Cuba now has two years to inform the CEDAW committee of steps it has taken towards implementing their recommendations. Its next review will be in 2017.

Yaremis Flores Marín is an independent lawyer and journalist in Cuba. Latin America.

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