

Izwi Lethu Our Voice 2021: Issue 25

We began this year on a rather sombre note, with a couple untimely gruesome deaths.

Hardest to deal with was the loss of Sisonke staffer, Noluvo Mapoqo, who tirelessly served the North West community with a smile for 3 years. Her efforts to make a difference in this region can never be disregarded. Rest in eternal power, Noluvo! **(See page 7)**

We remain grateful to the many who have been spared to journey with us; not forgetting those who had reached the end of their journey with us. Despite the rough start into the year with last year's issues piggy-backing into this year, we look forward to improved health and fortune. May this be a glorious year ending far better than the previous.

We look forward to a year of improved attitude in the treatment of sex workers when accessing the justice and healthcare systems. The call of action to decriminalise sex work remains. And the support along the way from grant-makers; funders; board members; family and friends including caring clients to sex workers does not go unnoticed. May you find it in your heart to continue the unwavering support to stand with us against injustices which continue to torment sex workers long after sex work is decriminalised.

Yonela Sinqu

KHOLI'S DESK

A conversation to gain insight on highlights; plans ahead.

What stood out for in 2020?

What stood out for me in 2020, is the support among sex workers when Covid-19 began. This invisible virus has brought about a sense of unity and comrade among sex workers. It also brought about the realisation of sex workers in South Africa among communities who previously looked down on sex workers. Covid-19 hit hard on sex workers in a way that some became homeless with no food, but the love, unity and solidarity is what kept us strong to seek solutions and means to survive. The unwavering support from stakeholders, allies, partners, Sisonke staff and members, sex workers themselves was indeed a breath-taking experience to witness. The resilience among sex workers and Sisonke staff and members with all the support from everyone to is something one cannot easily forget. It hasn't an easy journey, and it'll take time for all to ever recover from such, but we remain hopeful, despite the challenges.

If there was anything to go back to last year, what would it be?

Nothing, besides my work that I do daily. Doing my daily job makes me feel good as every time I go home at the end of the day, I go home knowing that I have positively contributed towards changing sex workers' lives and ensuring that the voiceless are heard.

The reflection of 2020 brings back bad memories and that is because of the how Covid-19 derailed so many of our plans and destroyed the income of sex workers at the same time, this was a harsh lesson learned to many of us as it introduced us to new ways of living. The harsh reality of it all, is that many may never recover and too many lives were lost. So I'm grateful that 2020 is finally a thing of the past.

What are you looking forward to this year?

Sisonke's independence! It is something that has been in the pipeline for a while now, It's just so exciting to see it actually happening. The increase of Sisonke staff; that means we will be able to have more staff which means more ground is covered to deliver the organisation's mandate. This will in turn afford Sisonke enough time to strategize the advocacy to intensify the call



for decriminalisation of adult sex work in South Africa which will reduce stigmatisation and discrimination and improve access to health and justice systems for adult sex workers.

Your message to all in the sex work sector

Let me extend my gratitude to all Sisonke funders for trusting us with their funds, keeping us under their wing to date; our allies who are playing a pivotal role into improving sex workers' lives with all the support, they give to Sisonke; without you all, we wouldn't have been able to display so much boldness in our work of activism. Not forgetting sex workers for being the crux of Sisonke. As beneficiaries, we are an organisation today because of the trust they have entrusted on us to lead and represent sex workers in South Africa. In closing; stay safe and be mindful of those who will use the pandemic to take advantage of us. Covid-19 is still a deadly virus; please let us adhere to previously set regulations.



a strong cry from all sex workers to decriminalise sex work ahead of the country's National Human Rights Day on March 21. See how Sisonke in some provinces honoured International Sex Workers' Rights Day which is observed on March 3 in pictures on various days ahead and after the day.

#sexworkiswork

#decriminalisesexwork

#equalrights



Picture: Linda Dumba

DISCUSSIONS: Limpopo held an intimate discussions enlightening sex workers and community members on the scourge of stigma on sex work while imparting useful information on Human Rights and sex work.



Picture: Philisiwe Skiti



Picture: Kallago Rasebitse

ACTIVISTS: Sisonke member and Gauteng former peer educator, Zibusiso Tshuma taking a stand against injustices faced by sex workers.

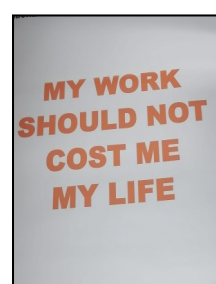


Pictures: Ntombi Mondo



About International Sex Workers' Rights Day

In 2001, more than 25 000 sex workers gathered in India for a festival, despite efforts from prohibitionist groups who tried to prevent it taking place by pressuring the government to revoke their permit. The event was organised by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, a Calcutta-based group that has more than 50 000 sex worker members, and members of their communities. Sex worker groups across the world have subsequently commemorated 3 March as International Sex Workers' Rights Day.



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[@Sisonke_ZA](https://twitter.com/Sisonke_ZA)

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Izwi Lethu contributor, **MANEO**, took to the streets of Johannesburg to see what questions members of the non sex work community have on sex work and sex workers. She sheds some light on the most common questions among these community members to demystify some of the myths and stereotypes surrounding sex work and sex workers.

Why use the term 'sex worker' rather than 'prostitute'?

A: The term 'sex worker' recognizes that sex work is work. 'Prostitution' on the other hand, has connotations of criminology and immorality. It is demeaning to refer to someone as a prostitute or the line of work as prostitution.

Why do some people do sex work?

A: To earn a livelihood. Some choose to do sex work because it is the best option they have to food on their tables. Others resort to sex work as a quick solution, to alleviate poverty after struggling to find other means to earn an income. Others find that sex work offers better pay and more flexible working. Everyone has a their reason, but the bottom-line is that everyone is looking to earn a living.



How safe is sex with a sex worker?

A: Sex workers have vested interest in working safely, because his or her income depends on staying healthy. Therefore, some clients have expressed how other sex workers have developed the skills of putting a condom on a client without them even noticing especially when they refuse to use a condom.

Do sex workers work during your menstrual cycle (periods) and how?

A: That is by choice, and if one chooses to, they have the option of making use of a sea sponge just before intercourse

with the client. Others use some contraception to disturb the cycle. Just a handy tip, use dark-colored sheets for the bed, a red or black colored condom, and a dark-colored towel thereafter to conceal the blood from the client.

Do sex workers have relationships?

A: Most women say sex work affected their relationships in predominantly negative ways, mainly relating to issues stemming from lying, trust, guilt, and jealousy. While a small number of the women reported positive impact from sex work including improved sexual self-esteem and confidence. Others use mental separation as a coping mechanism to manage the tension between sex work and their relationship.

Do men engage in sex work?

A: Nowadays it is common for men to be sex workers as well. Sex work is a trade for every consenting adult who wishes to render adult entertainment to other adults who are willing to pay for the service rendered to them.



To all the name-callers

By Yonela Siqu

Lady of the night, Maghosh, Nondindwa, Seqamgaqo, disease carriers, homewreckers, prostitute—the list is endless. The list is demeaning, the list insulting! Yet, you comfortably continue using it to fuel your ego; disguising your discriminations as ‘morality’. Well let me comfortably make you uncomfortable, if your ‘morality’ permits. Your name-calling has done more damage than good. You have aided in my raped friend’s inability to lay a charge against his/her rapist; aided in the death of others who have avoided the clinic to adhere to their ART treatment. Hope it makes you feel good knowing that the family they provided for now has less income to provide for their needs. Thank you ‘moral’ name-calling person, there’s yet another funeral. Thank you for aiding hate-crime and being the first to shout GBV. Thank you for costing us the decriminalisation of sex work, 20+ years later. Bravo! Well done on being so vocal on something you know nothing about. Something you claim to be far removed from. Yet, your voices are louder than ours over your ‘moral’ lives. Being a sex worker doesn’t make any of us less moral than you are. Nor does it make us any less human than what you are. While we on that ‘moral’ path, please do enlighten us, why does sex work so comfortably unsettle you? No offence intended, just trying to understand life from your glass house view. Name-calling boosts your ego, well rendering a service to someone I know nothing about; enabling me to provide without relying on hand-me-downs, boots mine. In your picket white fenced and high-walled neighborhood, how comfortable are you knowing you could at any given time be a victim of crime? And how likely would it be a sex worker, committing that crime, well... While you ponder that thought, let me carry on in my path as a sex worker, counting my notes and coins. You see us as uneducated, black, poor women who sell their bodies; sorry I’m not sorry for being your opinion. SHAMELESS, you scorn from your leather-seat German machine, pity we couldn’t care less, we’re busy minding our business. We owe you no explanations; we are here to afford our wallets the same brown bread you’re carting to your ‘moral’ home.



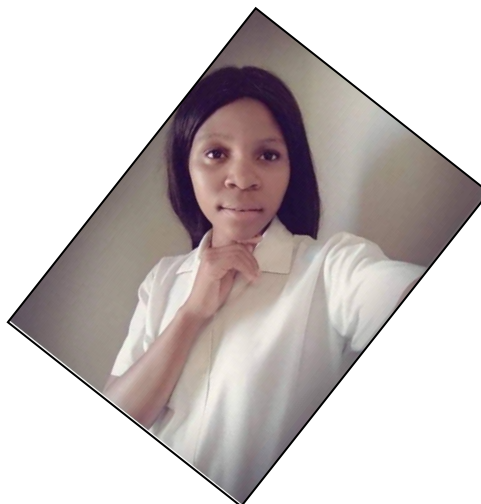
SUPPORTERS: Paarl-based Sisonke members and #NoExcuse standing in solidarity with the Sondarha family to bid Alwaba farewell in Mbekweni.

Gone never forgotten

By Philisiwe, WC MLO

A number of us had no clear indication of what this year had in store for us, nor did 20-year-old Alwaba Sondarha whose life was brutally ended by her boyfriend, Asive (24).

On Christmas Eve this vicious man bashed her head with gym weights, which landed her in one of Paarl General Hospital beds. According to doctors, as a result of the severity of her head injury she had to be transferred Tygerburg Hospital where she succumbed earlier this year. The news of Asive's arrest and charge of assault GBH, brought about ray of hope to many, including learners from Desmond MpiloTutu High School who voiced their anger against this gruesome act. Alwaba, was someone's daughter, a sister, aunt and a mother and a true friend to Sisonke and sex



SLAIN: Alwaba Sondarha

workers. Her determination to make a change among other young women in Paarl, can never be forgotten. In support of this slain heroine, Sisonke; Desmond MpiloTutu High School learners; Paarl-based Zonwabele Movement, (a group supporting gay men); men from Cape Town-based #NoExcuse (a group of young men opposing violence); and members of the community held a silent protest outside Paarl Magistrate Court.

Pending investigation, the case was postponed and a charge of murder was imposed on the accused.

Two days from the court date a beautiful memorial service where Alwaba was remembered was held at a stadium in Mbekweni not far from her home.

To bid farewell to Alwaba and support the distraught family were:

Sisonke members; friends; #NoExcuse; SAPS; Desmond Mpilo High School learners and teachers; and some members of the general community who knew her.

Alwaba's body left Paarl to be laid to rest at her Eastern Cape home in Indwe. Paarl-based Sisonke members are standing in solidarity for the call to justice and no bail for the accused.

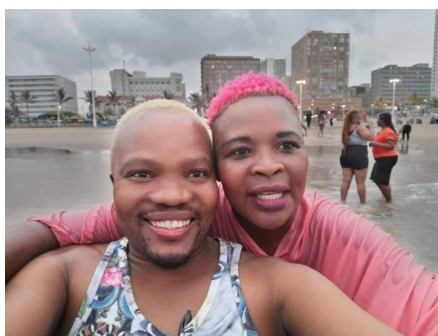
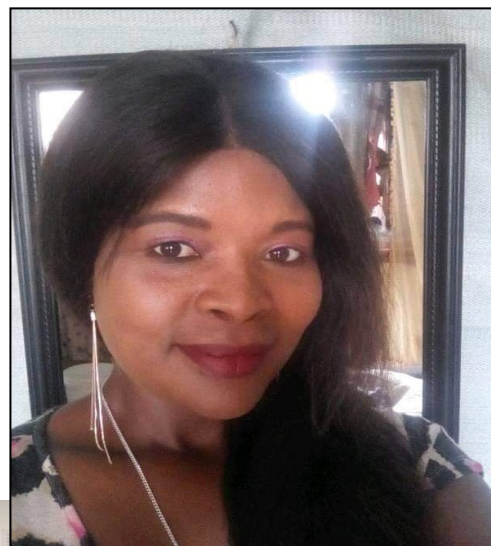
'We will not rest until justice for Alwaba is served' is the unanimous call from Sisonke members and allies.

The accused had been released on R1000 bail.

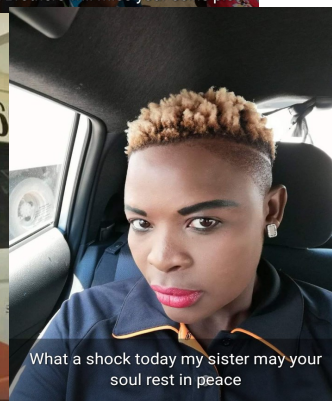
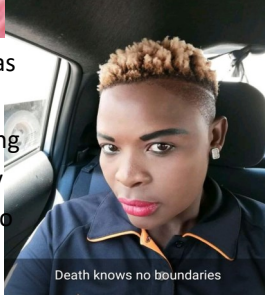
#SAYHERNAME
#Equalityforall
#ENDGBV

Sisonke North West media liaison officer, Noluvo Mapoqo has cheated death before, when she fell off a balcony and badly injured her head. Waking up to the news of her death in February this year shook the Movement. Noluvo was found at the back of her Mafikeng home in a pool of blood with stab wounds. Some recalled her as a fun-loving, lively young woman. Not only was Noluvo a dedicated woman in the sex work sector, but a mother too; her youngest only a year old at the time of her gruesome death. Noluvo was laid to rest at her rural home in Engcobo, Eastern Cape, with the East London Sisonke team among those who together with her family said their final goodbyes. Colleagues and friends, sharing their fond memories of her; others voicing how pained they are at the act calling for #justicefornoluvo

Rest in peace [Noluvo Mapoqo](#). You were a beautiful song in our spirits. We shall meet sooner. Hamba kahle Comrade.



I remember, this day in Durban, she was pregnant as we hit the beach and we had a conversation that led to her telling me that. She is going to name her baby after me. A few months later, it came to my attention by my fellow Sister Doris that Noluvo has a baby boy. And she named the baby "King K" the K stands for Katlego. I was truly honoured. I will for ever celebrate her through her son. Hope one day I'll meet the child. I must be a dad now. I personally think so, KING K wa mama le papa



On this very same day Katli both of you came to our room she saw my sunglasses and decided they belong to her I've been asking for them each and every time I saw her until she told me I am from Cape Town Head Office and I can easily buy more I lost them to her I remember she wore them in the national meeting and there was no sun. Drama Q.



I still don't believe she's gone but her memories and contribution will be with us forever

I remember her when we chat she will laugh even when she is angry

What a 'care-free' soul. Rest In Power Noluvo. She always showed eagerness to learn and would listen attentively whenever I had something to share with her. The world is cruel indeed.

TSIE. Program review 'chairperson men sector (NGAKA MODIRI MOLEMA DISTRICT. NW) she was calling me the godfather of her last born. We had agreed that next time we see each other I'll bring goods for the baby. Lovely young sister to me

In loving memory of my sweet daughter R.I.P my everything

The new kids on the block



Ntombikhona Mlondo joins Sisonke as media liaison officer in KZN. The single mother of two from Malukazi is passionate about healing and caring for others. She aspired to be a

nurse, but

By Mapula, North West MLO circumstances

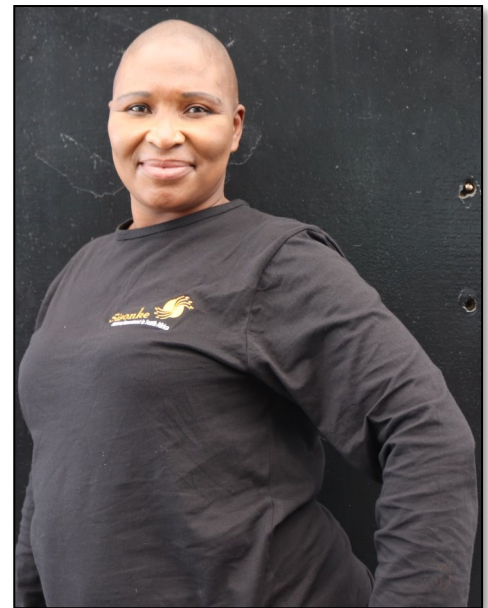
had never been favourable for her to pursue



Mother of five, **Xoliswa Sgutya-Mthethwa**, joins Sisonke as a Human Rights Defender/ Reactor in Mpumalanga. Widowed in 2002, with three children from her first marriage to

the Ntombela family; she remarried into the Mthethwa name. As a living testimony to gender-based violence (GBV) and domestic violence, Xoliswa took it upon herself to align her activism skills with Sisonke to reduce the scourge of violence against sex workers in Mpumalanga. The force to beckon with when it comes to raising the voice GBV against the prevalence of social ills against all womxn, especially sex workers. She prides herself in being able to raise her children as single mother. "I am both a mother and father to my children."

Sisonke Free State welcomes **Xholiswa Pampiri** as the human rights defender/ reactor. Xholiswa began serving sex workers as a Sisonke Board Member, who for 3 years volunteered her time to the Board in aid shape a Movement to improve the livelihood of sex workers. With no particular formal training, she is well-known for making her voice heard against social ills directed at sex workers. The mother to a teenage boy, aunt to a number of nieces and nephews and sister to six other women; Xholiswa, an epitome that sex work is indeed work.



All in search for greener pastures, she has moved from Gauteng to Rustenburg, before moving to Limpopo. Com-



ing from a family of three children, **Nondumiso Margaret Baliso** is flanked by her older brother and younger sister. Born and raised in the West Rand of Johannesburg, the former Goudwes High School pupil,

joins Sisonke as a

peer educator in Limpopo.

Beyond her versatility and quiet demeanour, the mother to a baby girl enjoys all things fashion. Having juggled between being the sole support structure at home and being a youngster, she finds solace in music —singing. Growing up she was a member of a choir in neighbourhood.

Be cash savvy

Sisonke member and Izwi Lethu contributor, Juliet, encourages others to work and save while they are able to. She cautions on the dangers of relying on a daily income.

It is important for everyone to know and understand how money works. This kind of knowledge helps you get your money to work for you instead of you working for money for the rest of your life.

As we grow older, we become weaker, it is at this stage when we require the money we have worked for while we could take care of us.

Therefore, saving and investing in something worthwhile should be on every sex worker's list. No different to football stars, sex workers have a shorter working span; which means that their source of income dries out very quickly leaving them with nothing to fall back on. It is advisable that all the sex workers seek financial advice or research on ways of best saving and investing. It would be ideal for sex workers' associations to offer this

kind of assistance to their members.

It is also unfortunate for sex workers, that things such as maternity benefit and UIF don't exist— it's a case of no work, no pay!

Like in any other job, one is required to retire, sex work is no different, but here one has no retirement fund to withdraw from.

In my view, while the time allows, one should also learn at least one handy skill to cater for a time when the flowers no longer bloom.

A lot of sex workers suffer a lot after retirement and this is a result of solely depending only on their sex work careers. Saving is most important; one must at least plan on putting a percentage of their earnings aside and reduce expenses, easier said than done, but it's doable.

When investing, it is important to invest on things that multiply over an extended period. For example one

may try out farming and where possible invest in property. Buy a house and rent it out people. Such investments are able to generate an income without you being physically there— start early. For those entering the industry, still in your 20s, now is your time. Nowadays trading in the stock exchange has also become another investment option. You just need to understand how the markets operate. Sex workers should learn to be curious about such things; rather than living in the moment.

All sex workers should make it their mission to be educated about finance and its maintenance time and again, that way it will be easier to know how money works and also be able to manage their hard-earned money. Start by visiting your bank and ask to see a consultant that can advise you on products they offer, which can best suit your financial needs.



Change from the men in blue

By Mapula, North West MLO

I once did business with a client; a whole night booking — we agreed on an amount. While I was with him, he took back the money which he had given to me and beat me up. When I went to the police, they told me that I am a

sex worker and that client did a great job by assaulting me because I'm breaking the law. I called the SWEAT/Sisonke Help-line and they appointed two people who accompanied me to the police station. A case was opened and that client was arrested and he was sentenced to 8 months in prison for assault.



Picture: Bill Oxford/ Unsplash



Pictures: Yonela Siqu

In the same province, sex workers on the street were being harassed by policemen while trying to conduct their business. Often these policemen would take us to other places where they would rape us (sex workers). We always thought we could not open cases against them because they were policemen. A day came when my friend invited us to a Sisonke creative space. At the creative space the host asked us about our challenges are when we are doing business.

We mentioned the issue of policemen who were raping us. We listened to how Sisonke could help us. We joined without hesitation. Days later after we became members, the police came again and we called the number on the membership card. Sisonke representatives came to our rescue. We then with them went to the police station, where we met with the station commissioner; thereafter we started working fine without being harassed and raped by the policemen.

Proud NW counsellor

By Mapula, North West MLO

From not knowing much about Sisonke, Odirile Motuku, 32, says a lot has changed to improve his life since becoming a Sisonke member last year.

All I knew about the Movement was what I had heard from my friends; who helped me join.

From being able to identify and relate to most of the hardships

faced by sex workers

daily, I soon became

a member of the

steering committee.

The creative spaces

and trainings which I

attended with the

encouragement of

my friends who

helped me become a

Sisonke member, motivated me to do more in my community.

As a result of my membership, I

got a bursary from Nacosa Institute Training.

As a result of that opportunity, I am now a qualified HIV/Aids counsellor; thanks to Sisonke and Nacosa.

I am now undergoing an internship programme at Peeletso Sechabeng Development, working as a data capturer and communication and marketing man-

ager in health promotion.

When not at

Peeletso, I go to

Boitekong

Healthcare Centre

where I'm given the

chance to do my

practical work as an

HIV/Aids counsellor

apart from continuing my duties

as a Sisonke steering committee

member in Bojanala. Improving



Odirile Motuku accepting his certificate from Nacosa's facilitator, Arina de Villiers after completing the HIV/Aids counselling training programme.

Picture: Supplied

the lives of sex workers to me is of most importance.

I want to be among those who make a positive im-

pact in people's lives and I am forever grateful for all

the opportunities I get to be able to do so.

Access to healthcare ensured

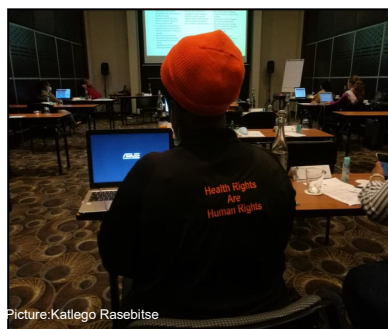
By Mapula, North West MLO

My friends and I had defaulted on our ART (not adhering to the prescribed methods of taking medication); for months we were not visiting the clinic for our appointments.

When we then decided to visit Luka Clinic, we were turned away without help. One of their reasons

for not helping us, was that we are Zimbabwean nationals.

We were fortunate to be at the spot



Picture: Katlego Rasebitse

were Sisonke steering committee members were doing a membership drive. We reported the matter to

them. They advised us to be a ready on a particular day when they would take us to the clinic.

The day came and when we arrived at the clinic they (steering committee members) talked to the sister in-charge and we were readmitted to the ART programme. Without fail, we are now taking our treatment.

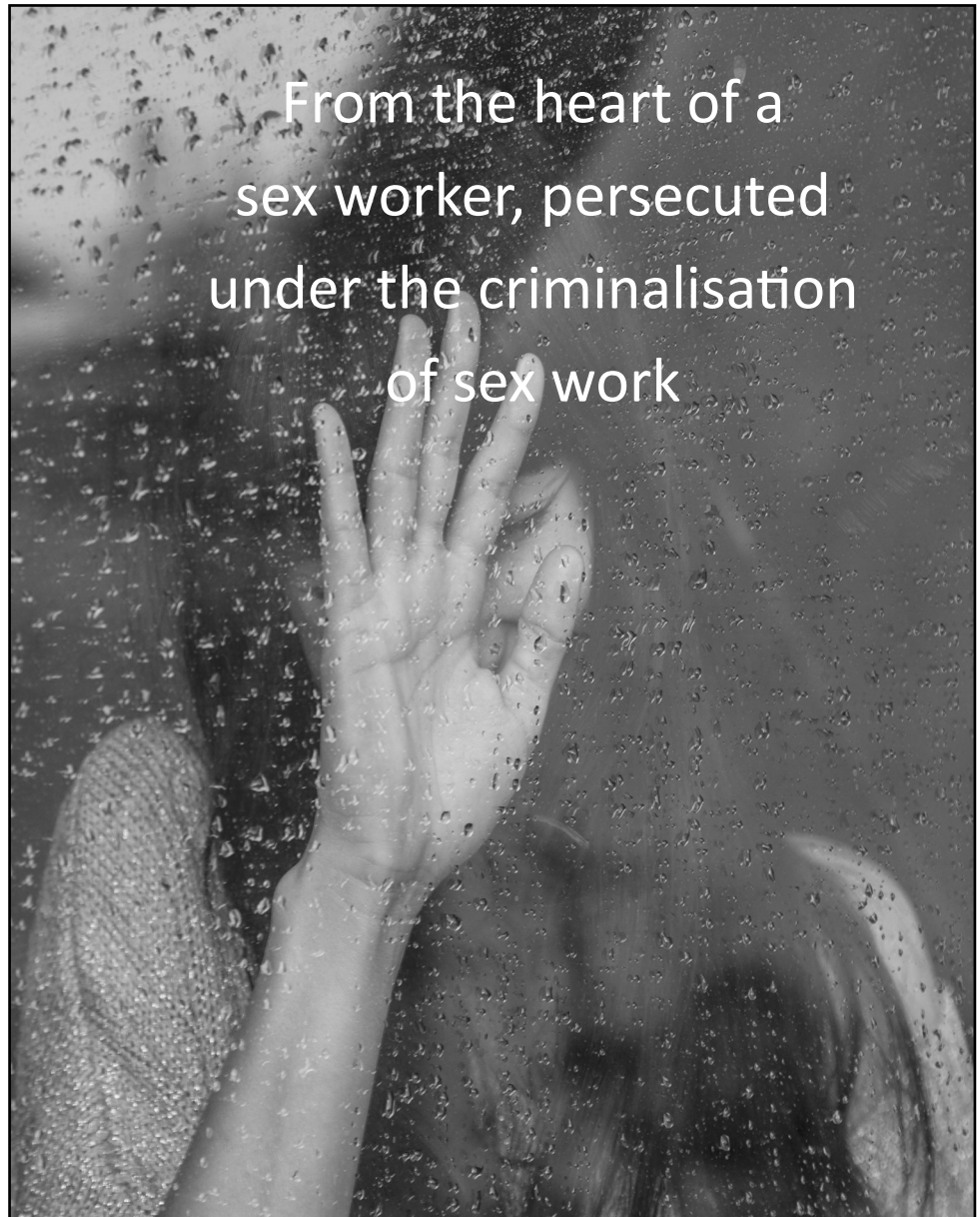
As of that day we now recognise the importance of being a Sisonke member regardless of our nationality.

D

Dear Mr
President

Come take a walk with me
Let's pretend we're just two
people and you're not better
than me
I'd like to ask you some ques-
tions if we can speak honestly
What do you feel when you see
all the homeless on the street ?
Who do you pray for at night
before you go to sleep?
What do you feel when you
look in the mirror? Are you
proud?
How do you sleep while the
rest of us cry? How do you
dream when a mother has no
chance to say goodbye? How
do you walk with your head
held high?
Can you even look me in the
eye and tell me why
Dear Mr President
Were you a lonely boy ? (Are
you a lonely boy?)
Are you a lonely boy?

How can you say no child is left behind? We're not dumb, and we're not blind
They're all sitting in your cells while you pave the road to hell
What kind of father would take his own daughter's rights away ?
And what kind of father might hate his own daughter is she were gay?
I can only imagine what the first lady has to say. You've come a long way from whiskey and cocaine
How do you sleep while the rest of us cry?
How do you dream when a mother has no chance to say goodbye?
How do you walk with your head held high?
Can you even look me in the eye? Let me tell you 'bout hard work
Minimum wage with a baby on the way let me tell you 'bout hard work building your house after
the bombs took them away Let me tell you 'bout hard work, building a bed out of a cardboard box
Let me tell you 'bout hard work. Hard work! Hard work! Oh!
How do you sleep at night? How do you walk with your head held high?
Dear Mr President
You'd never take a walk with me
Would you?



From the heart of a
sex worker, persecuted
under the criminalisation
of sex work

Courtesy songwriters: Alicia Moore/ William Mann

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Song performed by: P!nk