

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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End Garda Politicking on Prostitution Stop Garda Abuse of People in Sex Work

This evening at 6pm a petition signed by over 500 people will be delivered to Garda Commissioner Drew Harris. It calls on him to direct members of An Garda Síochána to cease politicking regarding prostitution.i

Lucy Smyth, of UglyMugs.ie, who started the petition, said she did so after her attention was drawn to an announcement that the Garda Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit was due to speak at a 'A Model for Scotland' lobbying event on 23 February.ⁱⁱ An Garda Síochána is an apolitical organisation and should not be speaking at lobbying events.

Sex work was further criminalised in Ireland most recently through the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, following a successful lobbying campaign by the Turn Off the Red Light (TORL) coalition. Since the 2017 legislative changes in Ireland crime against people in sex work has increased by 91% and violent crime specifically has increased by 92%.ⁱⁱⁱ Last month Amnesty International published a report showing how the 2017 law has facilitated the targeting and abuse of sex workers, the state is failing to protect them from violence and they now have a profound lack of trust in the Gardaí.^{iv}

“Sex workers in Ireland have suffered greatly because of the TORL campaign supported by the Gardaí.v I don’t want to see the same happen to sex workers in Scotland.” said Lucy Smyth.

Speaking for the first time about her own personal experience of Garda conduct during the TORL campaign, Lucy Smyth said ***“At that time members of the Gardaí told me that the reason they were supporting TORL is because the people running TORL were very powerful, and Gardaí were being offered benefits in exchange for their support. I was told that these benefits were not financial payments but rather things like promotion opportunities.”***

“Reflecting on this now I think there is an internationally recognised term for what that is. It is Grand Corruption, the abuse of high-level power that benefits the few at the expense of the many. I also feel like, in Ireland, Grand Corruption could be seen as something of a double

entendre, because I think a lot of people in power regard harming certain marginalised groups as 'grand', as in nothing to be too bothered about. But it is not 'grand', it causes huge harm."

"I also want to say that during the TORL campaign I personally suffered a great deal of abuse at the hands of members of the Gardaí which devastated my life. I used to be quite outspoken, but, for a long time now, the trauma of what happened here has almost completely silenced me. But I want to say this now. I want to stand with people who have experienced or are experiencing Garda abuse and say yes, this is my experience too."

"I implore the Garda Commissioner to think of the future well-being of people in sex work and victims of sex trafficking. The Gardaí have failed to address any of the very serious issues around their policing of sex work and sex trafficking for a great many years. The serious problem of garda members abusing people in sex work and sex trafficking, in particular abuse of power for sexual gain, is also not being addressed. This is causing huge harm to human beings and things will not improve here without Garda leaders taking action."

ENDS

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Ugly Mugs is a volunteer-run not-for-profit technology initiative that runs a safety scheme for sex workers in Ireland. Please see <https://uglymugs.ie/> for further details.

ⁱ The full text and details of signatories of the petition are available online at <https://my.uplift.ie/petitions/end-an-garda-siochana-politicking-on-sex-work>

ⁱⁱ 'A Model for Scotland' is a lobby group campaigning for a new legislative framework around sex work in Scotland. Their website, where you can find further information about them, is at <https://www.amodelforscotland.org/>. We were first alerted to their event taking place on 23 February 2022 titled "Harnessing International Evidence: challenging demand & supporting victims" and featuring as one of the speakers Detective Garda Karen Ryan, Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit, An Garda Siochana, Ireland, by social media posts such as <https://twitter.com/ScotlandModel/status/1491380344788254725>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Campbell, R., Smith, L., Leacy, B., Ryan, M. and Stoica, B. (2020) Not Collateral Damage: Trends in Violence and Hate Crimes Experienced by Sex Workers in the Republic of Ireland. Irish Journal of Sociology. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0791603520939794>

^{iv} Amnesty International (2022) Ireland: "We live within a violent system." Structural violence against sex workers in Ireland. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur29/5156/2022/en/>.

^v A high-profile example of this is Noirin O'Sullivan, then Garda Commissioner, speaking at a fundraising event called the "Mothers and Daughters' Lunch 2014" on 26 September 2014. This event was organised by the Immigrant Council of Ireland, then the lead organisation of the TORL lobby, and with the event specifically focussed on raising money for their work on sex work / trafficking. On 9 September 2014 UglyMugs.ie lodged a formal complaint to the Garda Commissioner about this case of Gardaí engaging in political lobbying to which no response was received.