



# BULLETIN : 17

from **DURBAR**

15<sup>th</sup> August 2012

## Durbar hosts Alternative International AIDS Conference successfully

The six days Alternative International AIDS Conference, dubbed as a Global Hub started with a pre-event gathering of sex workers on 21<sup>st</sup> July from over 43 countries who swamped Swabhumi in vibrant and colorful attires. This unique event was successfully hosted by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) along with the Network Project (NSWP) of Sex Worker's from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2012.

The preparation began in early year and a series of meetings were formed to handle multiple A parallel communication conferences also held in There was a communication conferences so workers' and stakeholders' from Kolkata.



for this conference December last of preparatory held and DMSC committees to activities. conference was Washington DC. satellite between the two that the sex other could participate

Apart from IAC, this is the 20th year of Kolkata's Sonagachi Project of HIV Intervention too, which has been globally acclaimed as the Model Project for AIDS prevention.

Sex workers from all over the world gathered to oppose USA's decision of not granting them travel visa. The representatives of sex workers from across the world demanded seven 'freedoms' for creating a global platform for sex workers to get their rights and meaningfully participate in the fight to end AIDS. The seven freedoms for sex workers are –

1. Freedom of movement and to migrate
2. Access to quality health services
3. Freedom to work and choose occupation
4. Associate and unionize
5. To be protected by the law

6. Freedom from abuse and violence
7. Freedom from stigma and discrimination

It is for the first time that transgender sex workers have got a platform to speak and join the wider campaign for safeguarding the rights of all sex workers – female, male and transgender.

Michele Sidibe, Executive Director of UNAIDS, said that he was extremely inspired by the festival as the people who face stigma and discrimination in the society are speaking out and taking control of their own destinies.

"The sex workers have done over the last decade to bring down the HIV epidemic by over 50% cannot be sustained unless sex work is decriminalized and the Positive Sex Workers are given the full range of services from STI treatment to ART medication without any discrimination." Said Dr. Smarajit Jana, Conference Chair.

Prior to the inaugural session a panel of senior journalists from India addressed the gathering on Media Responses to Sex Workers Issues and Concerns.

### Sex Workers' Rally marks Global Day of Action to end AIDS

As part of the International AIDS Conference hub, sex workers came down on the road on 24<sup>th</sup> July, 2012 to mark Global Day Economic and Social Thousands of sex the world hold a Kolkata after they the United States to International AIDS held in Washington part of an ongoing which has been by the sex workers in protest.



of Action for Justice to end AIDS. workers from across protest rally in were denied visa by attend an conference being DC. The rally was parallel conference organised in the city a bid to register their

More than 5000 sex 43 countries 'freedom rally' which

Sonagachi, the Asia's biggest red-light district to College Square and culminated in celebrating the 20 Years of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee. Heavily make-up male and transgender sex workers in wigs and saris and lesbian also walked through Kolkata's street, carrying banners and chanting slogans, that sex work is work and demanding decriminalization of sex work.

workers from across participated in a started from

Balloons, banners, posters and umbrellas that declared "I am a sex worker....I can be a policymaker too" or "Sex workers demand workers' rights" were held up by the demonstrators.

In the inaugural address, Shri Nikhil Dey, a well known social activist and Shri Baba Adhav, a prominent champion of unorganized workers, extended full support to the demand of Sex Workers to be given all the rights due to unorganized workers.

Mr. Nikhil Dey exhorted the “sex workers to join the Campaign for Universal Pension and in partnership with all marginal communities work for the fulfillment of their demand for pension and other social entitlements to lead a retired life with dignity and security.”

### **Durbar Disha celebrated Raksha Bandhan**

On the eve of Raksha Bandhan, the members of Durbar Disha Mahila Griha Sramik Samanwaya Committee, the union of organizations of domestic workers in Kolkata celebrated Raksha Bandhan. A sister ties a colourful rakhi, a sacred thread to her brother and the brother vows to guide the life. This year the festival was celebrated on August 2.



The domestic workers started with a song which was related brother and sister. About 60 assembled in the Dumdum occasion. Two interns, one from London attended the DMSC members. A brief introduction regarding the activities of the organisation shared with them. Then the female member of the organisation starts the celebration to tie the colourful rakhis on the hand of other members. The celebration ended with “Mishtimukh” (sharing sweets among the participants).

their program in the evening to the relationship of a domestic workers DIC to celebrate the from New York and other celebration along with other

### **Updates of the Supreme Court panel**

The Supreme Court on 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2011 set up a panel to rehabilitate sex workers in the country. The bench appointed a committee where Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee and Usha Multipurpose Co-operative Society were included.

The court while appointing the committee had formulated three suggestions for reference:

- Prevention of human trafficking
- Rehabilitation of sex workers who wish to leave sex work
- Conditions conducive for sex workers who wish to continue working as sex workers with dignity.

Appearing for the Ministry of WCD, Govt. of India, Additional Solicitor- General P.P. Malhotra urged the court to delete the reference made by it in its order of 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2011 on the issue relating to ‘creating conditions conducive for sex workers to work with dignity’. He also wanted the Bench to remove durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee from the panel constituted by the court as the organisation fights for the rights and dignity of the sex workers. He also told the a special Bench of Justice Altamas Kabir and Justice Gyan Sudha Misra that sex workers should not be allowed to operate in the country under the cloak of working ‘with dignity’ as suggested by the panel, since that would go contrary to the statute of the Immoral Trafficking Act.

The Supreme Court on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2012 agreed to examine the Centre’s appeal. However, the Centre’s move was opposed by senior counsel Jayant Bhushan and Anand Grover who submitted that the Act only prohibite brothel activities and punitive action against pimps.

The bench after hearing the arguments said that it would examine the issue at length.

## Forthcoming events

- Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee is going to organize a convention for Soni Sori **on 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2012** at Student Hall, Kolkata.

The convention will be organized by Durbar in a joint collaboration with Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity, Sramajibi Swikriti Mancha, Sangrami sramik Mancha, Sara Bangla Truck Parichalak Sangathan Samanwaya Committee, Durbar Disha Mahila Griha Sramik Samanwaya Committee, Sramajibi Swastha Udyog and Masum.

- Prior to the convention a press conference is organized on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2012 on Press Club, Kolkata.