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(613) 482-4133 · POWERottawa@gmail.com · www.PowerOttawa.ca

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Friday, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Attn: His Excellency Tuncay Babalı, Ambassador of Turkey

Re: The murder of Dora Özer

Your Excellency,

This is to inform you that Prostitutes of Ottawa-Gatineau Work Educate & Resist (POWER) stand with sexworkers and their allies around the world to denounce the continued stigmatization of sexwork and sexworkers both in Turkey and globally.

Dora Özer was an independent trans sexworker in Kusadasi, Aydin. She was murdered on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013, by a predator posing as a client.

We at POWER realize that sexwork is not illegal in Turkey, provided that the work is done in brothels by registered sexworkers. However the comparatively safe work environment offered by this model is only available to some and leaves far too many sexworkers vulnerable to violence by both predators and the state itself. Regulating sexwork in this way creates a situation where even the tenuous protection offered to “registered sexworkers” is kept inaccessible to those who have the fewest options for work outside the profession.

We understand that Turkish brothels are being systematically shut down – an action which puts more and more workers at risk – and that one must be legally recognized as a woman in order to work in those that remain. Stigma against trans women in Turkey is high enough that many have no other way to make a living but through sexwork. Yet, because of their trans status, they are denied the option of working legally in a brothel. Consequently, many trans sex workers are forced to work in unsafe conditions, which are only made worse by unnecessary police persecution.

As a Turkish trans woman, Dora Özer’s options were limited by severe discrimination. She chose to pursue sexwork, but she did not choose the conditions under-which she made that decision or under-which she worked.

It was the circumstances under-which Dora worked, the willful blind-eye turned by the state when it came to violence against both sexworkers and trans women, that facilitated her murder. By participating in, and thus sanctioning, the stigmatization of both transsexuality and sexworking, the government of Turkey has contributed directly to the murder of Dora Özer as well as at least thirty other trans women sexworkers whose murders have been acknowledged by the state since 2008.

Because of these deaths – the highest number of deaths in the Council of Europe – POWER calls on the government of Turkey to take every step to ensure the safety of trans sex workers, of all sexworkers, and of trans women within its borders; and to re-evaluate its regulation of the sex industry in favour of full decriminalization of all aspects of sexwork.

The POWER Board and Members