

Ex brothel owner switches sides

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By Ella Smook
Metro Writer

The city has found a unique weapon in its fight against prostitution - a former brothel owner who last hit the headlines when she took her attempts to have prostitution legalised all the way to the Constitutional Court.

Ellen Jordan, who lost R3,2-million and was bankrupted by her fruitless efforts to have the country's prostitution laws declared unconstitutional seven years ago, has since switched sides and will now be advising the city on the ins and outs of the industry.

Reports during her court case in 2002 dubbed her "the Madam of South Africa", but Jordan said yesterday she had changed and now believed the sex industry was exploitative and women were driven to it through lack of choice.

Dissenting from the majority judgment which found prostitution laws were not unconstitutional, justices Kate O'Regan and Albie Sachs said that making prostitutes the main offenders and their pimps mere accomplices, reinforced sexual double standards and perpetuated gender stereotypes.

Councillor JP Smith echoed this position yesterday, saying the city would in future focus less on law enforcement targeting prostitutes and more on enforcement targeting their clients - including cracking down on strip clubs, brothels and pimps.

But he said the city, in conjunction with religious bodies, would focus most of its efforts on setting up structures to provide a way out for sex workers.

Speaking at a press conference following a meeting with the Family Policy Institute, Jordan and Doctors for Life International representative Abraham Warren, Smith said there were not enough places of safety in the city, and the matter would be urgently addressed.

Social workers would also be accompanying vice squads in future, he said.

Jordan said she believed the city was doing "the right thing" in helping "girls" who were "lost" and "exploited" because they saw "no other alternative, no other way".

Warren, whose organisation appeared for the State in opposing Jordan's Constitutional Court bid, said he believed the most effective way to help was to provide a comprehensive exit strategy for sex workers.

Asked whether it was not an infringement on the rights of women to tell them they were not allowed to work as prostitutes, Warren said there were other examples of laws that on the face of it infringed certain rights, but were designed to protect.

Errol Naidoo, head of the Family Policy Institute, said the smoking law, for instance, limited the right of people to smoke wherever they wanted to, yet there was no outrage about that because everyone understood that it was a harmful practice.

Asked about timelines for implementation of the new strategy, Smith said roleplayers were rushing to get structures in place, as there was increasing evidence that recruitment of women and children was taking place ahead of the World Cup and the "bumper season" pimps were expecting.

After losing her Constitutional Court case, Jordan had commented that she feared the ruling had only opened the door to more corruption, exploitation and abuse.

Yesterday, she said that cracking down on prostitution would not drive the industry further underground.

"I don't think it can go any lower than it is," she said.

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