

Canadian Law Allowing Brothels Sees Christian Opposition

A Canadian court announced its ruling Monday on a landmark 2010 case, legalizing brothels and pimping in the province of Ontario. Christian organizations in the country are strongly opposing the law.

According to lawmakers, it will help ensure the safety of women who are already part of the country's legal prostitution industry.

The Ontario Court of Appeal upheld the 2010 ruling by Ontario Superior Court Justice Susan Himel, which stated that criminalizing brothels and "non-exploitative" commercial relationships between prostitutes and pimps was "unconstitutional."

Sex workers will now be allowed to hire drivers, bodyguards and support staff and work indoors in organized brothels or "bawdy houses," but "exploitation" by pimps is still illegal.

Several Christian groups have spoken out.

Julia Beazley, policy analyst with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, argued, "there is little sense in trying to stop human trafficking ... if we're not going to address the end point of most trafficking, which is prostitution."

Ranjan Agarwal, a lawyer representing the Christian Legal Fellowship, Catholic Rights League and REAL Women of Canada, called prostitution "an attack on the fundamental values of modern Canadian society."

Prostitution is legal in Canada, but there are laws in place that prohibit brothels and deny anyone the right to live "on

the avails of prostitution" or "profit off another's prostitution."

However, the Ontario court dismissed these laws, claiming in its decision that a brothel ban would "prevent prostitutes from taking the basic safety precaution of moving indoors to locations under their control."

Beazley points out that surveys have found that 90 percent of women in prostitution in Canada would get out if they could.

"Prostitution is not safe, and must not be legitimated as a form of work. It must not be accepted as a solution to female poverty," she says. "We must be unambiguous in defining prostitution as a form of violence, abuse and control of vulnerable women, children and men, and we need to shift the focus of our laws in order to achieve the Criminal Code's intended objective of preventing prostitution and its associated harms."

The three majority justices out of five wrote in their decision: "Prostitution is a controversial topic, one that provokes heated and heartfelt debate about morality, equality, personal autonomy and public safety.

"It is not the court's role to engage in that debate. Our role is to decide whether or not the challenged laws accord with the Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land."

According to Monday's decision, the law can be rewritten by the Canadian government within a year. The decision will likely be appealed to the Canadian Supreme Court.