

## Swaziland told to legalise prostitution, gay marriage

Written by Editor

Wednesday, 19 August 2009 19:56

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HIV and gay activists in Swaziland are calling for the legalisation of prostitution and gay marriages to bring the spread of the HIV epidemic under control.

Speaking at the country's National Smart Partnership Dialogue in Manzini on Wednesday, Swaziland Aids Support Organisation (SASO) spokesperson, Vusi Matsebula, said it was necessary to conduct a study to look at the role prostitutes play in the spread of the disease.

"We need to embark on a research that would help with regard to the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. I believe sex workers can play a meaningful role in preventing the spread of the disease," said Matsebula.

Matsebula said other "controversial groups" like same-sex couples should be legally recognised and become involved in combating the disease.

He said because Swaziland didn't allow same-sex marriages, people were ending up in "marriages of convenience".

"These people cheat on their spouses because they are not allowed to marry partners of the same sex," said Matsebula.

Matsebula said Swaziland's current approach to combating the disease was not holistic and needed to involve groups like prostitutes.

Mpumalanga Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) co-ordinator, Bheki Khoza, said SASO's proposal is a good idea.

"We also believe that if the sex trade is legalised, sex workers can be workshopped and monitored. This will definitely reduce the rate of HIV infections in the country," said Khoza on Thursday.

Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) director, Eric Harper, also recommended the decriminalisation of sex work alongside a new prostitution law that addresses potential harm and HIV infections.

"The decriminalisation of sex work in countries like Swaziland and South Africa will reduce the rate of HIV infection because sex workers will engage in safer sex," said Harper.

He said the vast majority of sex workers in Africa enter the sex industry in order to provide for their families.

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"The criminalisation of sex work doesn't stop sex work from being a career. Not everybody has the luxury of attending university. Everyone should have the right to claim autonomy over their body and its use, providing it doesn't hurt anyone else," he said.

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