

**Scottish Women Against Pornography – SWAP  
P.O. Box 23097, Brunswick Road, Edinburgh EH7 4YX**

Margaret Curran  
Minister for Communities  
Scottish Executive  
Victoria Quay  
Edinburgh  
EH6 6QQ

November 21<sup>st</sup> 2003

Dear Ms Curran,

We welcome your comments in the Sunday Herald (20.07.03) where you stated that women's issues would become a thread running through Executive policy over the duration of the current administration. Your recognition that we still have a great deal of work to do to achieve equality for women in Scotland is particularly relevant given the role that adult pornography has been proven to play in maintaining and perpetuating the sexual stereotyping which continues to deny women equality today.

However, we are concerned about some comments made by Ms. McCole when she responded on your behalf to our letter of 15/08/03. We were surprised when she referred to the 'contradictory' research findings regarding the link between pornography and violence against women and children, and would be pleased to receive further details on this matter.

Our own extensive review of the substantial body of internationally recognised research in this area has revealed incontrovertible evidence about links between pornography and sexual violence. This evidence indicates that:

- Pornography plays a key role in creating and maintaining sex as a basis for discrimination
- Pornography contributes causally to the attitudes and behaviours of violence and discrimination which define the treatment and status of half the population
- Men exposed to pornography display greater callousness, bigotry and contempt towards women and decreased support for equality between the sexes

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Scottish Women Against Pornography was asked by the RCNE (Rape Crisis Network Europe), to present a paper on the issue of Sexual Violence and Pornography at its conference in Dublin on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2003. The conference was attended by women from 16 European countries and we were heartened by the overwhelming consensus among the delegates about the harmful role pornography plays in sexual violence against women and children.

In her letter Ms. McCole also mentioned the increasing penalties that the Executive has now made available to the courts in cases involving child pornography to better

reflect the seriousness of these offences. It is obviously an extremely serious offence to photograph children in sexually explicit positions and to make available this material to others. However, this is only one part of the role that pornography plays in child sexual abuse. You may be aware of the research carried out by Ray Wyre Director of the Gracewell Clinic which treats sex offenders in the UK. Wyre is very clear about the role that pornography plays in child sexual abuse, rape and sexual assault, and he has demonstrated how adult pornography is implicated at every stage in the cycle of child sexual abuse. He has stated that "the role of adult pornography in sexualising the environment for children is, I believe, a major and underestimated issue. It is very easy, he says, to abuse children if adult pornography is used".

Mr. Wyre has also exploded the myth that pornography somehow acts as a safe sexual outlet and so helps to prevent more sexual crime. On the contrary, he has found that offender's use of pornography actually increases before the commission of a sexual crime. The pornographic material, he states, acts as a disinhibitor and normaliser, and, in the distorted thinking and perceptions of the sexual offender, legitimises the offence and gives him permission to act out his criminal sexual behaviour. One important factor in this process is how pornography addresses coercive sex (i.e. rape). Wyre has found that in 97% of pornographic texts dealing with rape women are depicted as enjoying the experience.

Whilst we believe that the Executive is beginning to take steps to address the issue of child pornography and child sexual abuse we are concerned that at present nothing is being done to address the serious issue of the links between adult pornography and its role in sexual abuse and violence against women and children. Until steps are taken to address the issue of the harm of pornography comprehensively, the Executive's response to child abuse must remain piecemeal and inadequate.

Please would you let us know the progress of the literature review referred to by Ms McCole.

Finally, we were disappointed that you were unable to accept our request to meet. We continue to feel that there are pressing issues relating to the relationship between gender equality, pornography and sexual violence that need to be addressed by the Scottish Executive. We would therefore ask once more to meet with you.

Yours Sincerely

  
  
  
  
