

# SOLWODI

Solidarity with  
women in distress

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Solidarität mit  
Frauen in Not

## Newsletter

No. 100, June 2014



**Dear friends and all other people interested in our work,**

“Building bridges with Christ” – Christians came together under this motto in Regensburg at the end of May. Even SOLWODI’s personnel were there. I am electrified each time on this day by this energy that arises when reflective people act together. It is when they become engaged and are in search of a common goal, when many Christians have decided to build a bridge for humanity with Christ, this then results in great potential to improve humanity. This is a wonderful feeling.

“Building bridges with Christ” is also a SOLWODI motto. We help girls who have been misled into prostitution and women who sell their bodies out of desperation to build bridges to a new life without violence. Unfortunately, we cannot be in every location where we are needed – such as in Brazil where the football World Cup is not only about sport but as always, also about sex tourism. (Page 3).

Our bridge to you is – for the last 30 years – this newsletter. Today you hold in your hands the 100<sup>th</sup> issue of which we are very proud and have hence established contact with a helper from the early beginnings (page 4). A newsletter joins together a community that supports SOLWODI. We report about our work and also about you, our readers and your projects, ideas and activities for SOLWODI. That is exactly what brings us further. For example, two groups of engaged people are working at the moment to deepen the SOLWODI network with two new counselling centres (see page 2).

“SOLWODI is a constant and growing challenge,” wrote a colleague in 1987 in one of the first issues. That has never changed for me. To help us carry out our tasks as an active and growing community, I would like to appeal to you from the heart to speak out about our work and concerns. When you get to know people who could be interested in us, give them our newsletters or ask them if we may send them a copy. With your help we will have a real chance to see 100 more issues if the crimes against women in distress continue. The best situation would be if SOLWODI were not needed! Thank you.

*Sister Lea Ackermann*

### **Political operation for an end to prostitution: Social Minister Katrin Altpeter supports SOLWODI’s Swedish-model demand**

The minister for social affairs for Baden Württemberg, Katrin Altpeter, held a meeting with representatives from SOLWODI on 26 March in Stuttgart. Subjects under discussion included the work of SOLWODI, the German Prostitution Act and the signed campaign “End Prostitution!” With the petition, which has been signed by 20,000 supporters, SOLWODI calls for the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services.

“It was with great pleasure and conviction that I added my signature and I wish the campaign much attention and success,” said Minister Altpeter. “Even I consider that a general prohibition on prostitution to be the best solution.” This would penalise the client and not the women in prostitution. SOLWODI’s representatives described to the minister the situation of affected women in prostitution in Germany today, almost 15 years after the implementation of the Prostitution Act. The minister displayed alarm that the women are perceived more and more as mere goods and pointed to the positive experience that the Swedish prohibition has produced: the clear decline in prostitution. Human trafficking could be better fought – Sweden is today no longer a lucrative market for human traffickers.

The minister and SOLWODI agreed that the path to the Swedish model is still a long way for Germany. A quick improvement of the situation for women in prostitution is therefore all the more important for example though compulsory health checks, compulsory brothel permits and the admission of new evidence before the court. “I am definitely convinced,” said Altpeter, “that a general ban on prostitution in Germany cannot be ignored sooner or later.”



*Katrin Altpeter*

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SOLWODI is regionally active through the counseling centres, women's homes and shelters. SOLWODI Associations are networked across the country and through political and practical work, not only nationally, but also Europe wide engaged. Read for yourself!

**Regionally active... in Waldkirchen: Project week on the subject of human trafficking**

The Waldkirchen Vocational Education Centre organized in March a project week on human trafficking and forced prostitution involving almost 30 classes from professional, child care, hotel management and technical schools. Brigitte Egelmeare, SOLWODI's representative from SOLWODI Passau discussed with the students about the extent of prostitution in Germany, the Prostitution Act and the scam of the loverboy. The topics were received with great interest and concern and were further discussed during subsequent classes.



**... in Aachen: Podium discussion with Sister Lea Ackermann**

SOLWODI founder Sister Lea Ackermann und SOLWODI colleague Roshan Heiler took part in a podium discussion in Aachen on 30 April. The event titled "Trafficking in our midst" attracted considerable attention. The question whether prostitution should be banned has been controversial and heatedly debated. Sister Ackermann explained why SOLWODI was fighting for a ban on the purchase of sexual services. "In a modern society there must be no room for prostitution," said Sr. Lea. Other European countries have come to this realization. France, for example, is committed to a Europe without prostitution.

**... in Fulda: Building a new counseling centre**

The interregional working group "Honour and Violence" have long tackled the subject of forced marriages and are hence building of a special counselling centre in the region of Fulda. Due to the special requirements with regards to security and complex situations, women's shelters and other regional existing facilities are overwhelmed in the medium and long term.

After Renate Hofmann (SOLWODI Bad Kissingen) presented SOLWODI's work at the Fulda District Office, the question came about as to whether SOLWODI, due to its special technical expertise, could establish a special counselling centre. The districts Fulda, Vogelsberg and Hersfeld-Rotenburg have signaled their willingness to support. The work on site should be taken up this year, depending on the financing situation. From 27 June to 21 July, Fulda will host weeks focusing on "Against violence in the name of honor". The opening lecture will be delivered by Sister Lea Ackermann.

**Networked nationwide ... in Regensburg: New SOLWODI counselling centre is important for the entire region**

What should be done when the counselling need is so big but the next SOLWODI centres are far away in Passau, Augsburg, Bad Kissingen or Munich? The working group on human trafficking and forced prostitution of the Catholic German Women's Federation (KDFB) in Regensburg decided summarily to start a new counselling centre there with SOLODI. The KDFB had also brought SOLWODI to Passau and has supported it ever since. The volunteers are particularly concerned about the area near the border with the Czech Republic, where a large, almost uncontrollable prostitution market has emerged and where many women are totally defenceless against the most dangerous conditions. In addition to counselling, the programme includes awareness raising and public relations activities. The project receives the support of the Diocese of Regensburg. Dr. Gabriele Zinkl, official advisor of the Bishops consortium in Regensburg enabled that the collection from the Catholic Day that took place at the end of May in Regensburg, would go to supporting the establishment of the counselling centre which will open in the near future. The construction of the centre is guaranteed with this grant. Even the Bishop has pledged his support.

**Nationally and Europe-wide engaged ... in Regensburg: SOLWODI represented at the Catholic Day**

The Catholic Day took place in Regensburg from 28 May to 1 June. The topic of human trafficking was presented with 14 events. Sister Lea Ackermann gave a lecture entitled "This concerns us all: stop human trafficking. Churches in the fight against modern day slavery and exploitation." SOLWODI offered a further seminar on human rights. The collection at this year's event went to SOLWODI to build the new counselling centre in Regensburg.

**... in Berlin: the Swedish model in Deutschland?**

The Swedish Embassy held a symposium on 14 March entitled "Prostitution. The Swedish Way". Experienced Swedish experts from the fields of justice, police and social workers reported on their experiences with the Swedish prostitution legislation and discussed with German experts. Both Swedish and German participants were critical of prostitution. SOLWODI was represented and participated in the discussion. SOLWODI calls for a ban on the purchase of sexual services, similar to the ban in force in Sweden since 1999.



Anna Skarhed, Swedish Chancellor of Justice  
Foto: Mårten Arvidsson / Embassy of Sweden

## Being a woman in ... Brazil

by Marcia Soraya Gonçalves

For football fans, the World Cup in Brazil is one big party which includes not only a lot of beer and chips but also, sadly, women. As the country gears up for the tourist flows in all their dubious needs, Marcia Soraya Gonçalves reported on the daily lives of women in Brazil.



When I think of my youth in Brazil, I remember that I only went to play in front of our house when one of my brothers or my cousins remained within calling distance. When I was not even 12 years old, I felt sick with worry when my mother sent me to the grocery store alone: I felt dirty when I heard the whistling and the vulgar shouts of the men behind me. To this day, I hear sexual innuendo when I go on the road without my husband.

In my country women are objects—valued according to their body size and not otherwise taken seriously. Regardless of when you turn on the television, whether in the children's programmes, a talk show or soap opera – there is somewhere always an almost naked woman. Even on the lunch programme we have stars on the nipples and a shoehorn-like piece of plastic ("tapa-sexo" - "sex cover") covering the shame.

In the media, as in life, the man has all the sexual freedoms and the right of the woman's body. If a woman encounters violence, questions are raised as to whether she even provoked it or provocatively moved so that the man was left with no alternative. The latest figures from the Institute for Applied Economics (IPEA) is not surprising: a quarter of the population thinks that scantily clad women

deserve rape. Fifty-eight percent are not sure if there would be less rape if the women knew just how to behave. Violence within a relationship or marriage? Totally ok, just no police! More than a quarter of respondents believe that the wife must satisfy her husband sexually, regardless of her condition. These figures hide infinitely many tragic stories. A friend appears regularly bruised. To my question as to the cause, my sister-in-law answers easily: "Her husband beats her." I do not understand the world anymore. Why does no one do anything about it? Why it does not matter? What should I do now?

The advice of my sister in law was, to my horror, not very encouraging. "The woman probably found it exciting to be beaten. She probably deserved the beatings because she brought her husband to distraction and he failed in bed." Her advice: "Stay out of it. Neither you nor anybody else has to meddle someone else's married life."

I was desperate and talked to all my friends. Amazingly, no one else was as upset. Finally, I simply offered my girlfriend my help. She refused vehemently. I was stunned, called the hotline of the nearest police station for violence against women. It said: "Mrs. Gonçalves, the victim agrees to

the charges, will she testify? If not, we cannot do anything." The man has since broken up with my girlfriend after meeting a younger woman. My girlfriend is apparently free, but she remains a prisoner of her own powerlessness.

I live in the central part, in the state of Tocantins, in one of the most conservative, economically and socially unrefined area. The women's struggle for respect and recognition is something I experience every day - sometimes there is success. The world of women in Brazil is a freer place today. Today, it is desirable that the girls study, become independent and live their dreams. Government subsidies allow even women in extreme poverty to attend university.

And yet, explicit and implicit sexual harassment and violence are omnipresent in Brazil. Perhaps the Brazilian Macho is trying to continue to maintain his dwindling power over women, at least in one area.

For nearly four years, a woman has president of Brazil. But what do the voters want to know? They ask how she looks in a bikini and if she was a lesbian because she did not marry again after her last divorce. The prison of women has, for a long time, not been made of iron bars, but from fossilised views on womanhood.

## A happy end for mother and child:

**The Iranian, Bahare Balvasi, and her daughter are reunited after three years apart**

by Soni Unterreithmeier

The fighting spirit was unbroken, but the hope had sunk: While seeking asylum, Bahare Balvasi has spent the past three years living in Germany fighting for her daughter Hasti, who lived with a foster family in the Netherlands since 2011. On several occasions we have reported on the fate of the family. Bahare Balvasi, who has since been granted asylum in Germany, had stayed for a short time in the Netherlands. There she suffered—as many women do shortly after fleeing—severe depression. Her daughter was therefore placed in a foster family. And there, according to the will of the Dutch authorities, she was to have remained. This despite the fact that the mother later recovered, was long since living in Augsburg and that the conditions in the foster family gave reasons for concern.

In April, the unbelievable happened. The Dutch court that had so far always sided on the part of guardians and foster parents, finally agreed to the mother being granted custody. The girl was immediately made to leave the country on April 18 and SOLWODI organised the return trip by train. Not even the most necessary of documents were given to the girl, so she was unable to be registered with either the Immigration Office or the Job Centre. Around the same time, a little sister was born, bursting the two-room apartment at the seams. This time it was the Augsburg Social Speaker Max Weinkamm who helped arrange a larger apartment. SOLWODI is assisting the family with the authorities and the establishment of the apartment. We celebrate with family the unexpected happy ending for both mother and daughter.

## Woman of the first hour

Rosemarie Buchner distributed the first SOLWODI newsletter and has since been helping to win over loyal supporters for the organisation.

Rosemarie Buchner from Munich has accompanied SOLWODI's development from the beginning and has actively supported Sister Lea. Since the first edition she has made sure that as many people as possible received the latest edition of the SOLWODI newsletter. Buchner now 73 years old, has four children and six grandchildren and is still full of energy for SOLWODI and her own exciting projects.

### Question: How did you get to know Sister Lea?

Rosemarie Buchner: I met Lea in the novitiate of the Weißen Schwestern. Due to an illness I had to give up this career. Later I visited the home economics school in Munich and got to know Lea better. We lived within five minutes of each other. We were always out in the evenings listening to lectures. We addressed the same issues. Then Lea went to Rwanda and wrote to me in a letter: "Come to us, we need home economics teachers." But I had since met my husband and he wanted to marry me. And I asked the good God what I should do. He did not respond so I chose what was for me a more obvious decision and got married.



Sr. Lea Ackermann and Rosemarie Buchner, Rwanda 1978

### Why have you been helping till today, to bring the newsletters to the people?

Rosemarie Buchner: SOLWODI needs donations. The newsletters bring donations. The books are also just as important. Whenever there is a new book from Lea available, I immediately buy 20 copies, place a newsletter inside each one and give them away. The people are then impressed and they donate. Most of them continue as donors. I am very thankful for Christianity because people such as Lea do not exist in other religions. SOLWODI is a gift which has developed with us.

### You are still socially engaged, even for SOLWODI. How?

Rosemarie Buchner: I still have lots of energy. I taught children for 30 years, cared for those whose parents could not look after properly. At the moment I am working in Berlin on a huge project: Berlin Youth City. I am developing a space where young people and the elderly could live affordably. This involves both parties caring for each other. I am still helping SOLWODI of course, and continue to be the fire-fighter who helps individual women by taking them to the consulate or accompanying them to the authorities.

### Are you also supporting the campaign to end prostitution?

Rosemarie Buchner: Yes, of course and I am absolutely convinced! Prostitution sits alongside the slave trade. There is no other way other than prohibition. In prostitution, women will always be weaker than men. This despite the fact that I believe women are inherently stronger.



Sr. Lea Ackermann And Rosemarie Buchner, Munich 2011

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