

# SOLWODI

Solidarity with  
women in distress

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Solidarität mit  
Frauen in Not

**Newsletter**  
No. 70, December 2006

## Dear Friends of SOLWODI,

a hectic year is drawing to a close. The football World Cup was extremely challenging for us. The Federal Ministry for Families, which financed an external scientific study of our hotline for women forced into prostitution, has reserved the right to publish the results of the evaluation. We expect the results to be announced at the end of 2006, so we won't be able to report in more detail until the next newsletter.

What I am allowed to say is: we received 2,500 calls, of which a great number was unfortunately made up of "silent-callers" and jokers. We were able to give concrete support in 211 serious cases, by supplying information, counselling and arranging for safe accommodation. The success in these cases was due partly to the thorough preparation of our "telephonists" and also thanks to the competent support given by our specialist counsellors and our tight network of helpers.

From 8th to 16th October I was travelling in and around Mombasa. I fly there once a year to visit our counselling centres along the Kenyan coast and see the development of SOLWODI Kenya. It always gives me pleasure to meet women, girls and children who prove how effective our support is. This time I was particularly impressed by the commitment of our employees. I've described the visit in detail in a travel report which can be ordered by phone or email, and which is available (*in German*) via [www.solwodi.de](http://www.solwodi.de). I have included one point in this newsletter – the legal aid support.

In my last introduction I mentioned that we are increasingly being confronted by forced marriages. One page of this newsletter is dedicated to this disturbing subject.

Be sure, dear friends, that in spite of all the problems and difficulties, we will continue to fight for a humane coexistence. Christmas is just around the corner and bears as a reminder that we are called to make the world a better place. That is what SOLWODI is about. And you support us. My heartfelt thanks, a Merry Christmas and God's blessing in the New Year.



*Yours, Sr. Lea*

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## A joint book

Hard to believe – Lea Ackermann will turn seventy on 2nd February 2007! To celebrate her birthday, the book which she wrote together with the Pallotine Father Fritz Koester will be published in January by Koesel Publishers. The professor for theology has been surrogate pastor in Boppard-Hirzenach since 1988. Sister Lea and the SOLWODI headquarters moved in to the baroque provost building. The nun and the father are also the social parents to two foster children. This unusual family meet daily to share their three meals in the provost kitchen. The book has captured the lively humour and argumentativeness which takes place there. It is a collection of discussions which Sister Lea and Father Koester exchanged at the kitchen table: (about God and the World).

*Lea Ackermann and Fritz Köster: „Ueber Gott und die Welt. Gespraechе am Kuechentisch“ (Koesel, ca. 19.95 €).*

## Legal Aid for Women and Girls in Kenya

By Lea Ackermann

Women and girls in Kenya are subject to discriminatory laws, which tempt the police along the coast region to using them arbitrarily and corruptively. SOLWODI gives legal support.

During my visit this year in Kenya I was shown the results of a SOLWODI survey on the effects of a municipal law which forbids "loitering for immoral purposes". Interviews with police in eleven different police stations along the coastal regions of Mombasa to Malindi and Likoni showed: from between 26 and 41 people are arrested each day for allegedly breaking this law – almost all are women and children.

In the jails employees of SOLWODI-Kenya spoke to those affected: among them a ten year old girl. At various SOLWODI information events, dozens of women and youngsters told of being arrested on the streets for no reasons. „We now start running as soon as we see a police car“, they said.

Twelve year old Siama: because she doesn't go to school, she plays during the day with friends on the street. Suddenly police arrived and pulled them into a police car. She

had no idea why. She – like most others who get arrested – had never heard of a law against „loitering for immoral purposes“.

Similarly, the mother of a small child heard of the law for the first time when she became accused. When she was questioned at the police station she swore she was on the way to pick up medicine for her sick brother; her had left her child, who she was still breast-feeding, at home. That didn't help her. The woman was locked up for two days. In order to get back to her baby, she decided to admit guilt and pay a fine.

The fines convert to about 12 to 120 Euros and are decided on at the police's own discretion and probably end up in their own pockets. Even though 12 Euros is a lot of money for most of those arrested, over 90 percent of those questioned in the jails and at the information events said they pleaded guilty to „buy themselves free“ and escape from the

questionings, court proceedings and imprisonment.

The results of the survey clearly show how important SOLWODI-Kenya's legal aid project is, which helps women and children fight robbery of freedom, police discrimination and corruption. SOLWODI-Deutschland together with the Berliner Foundation „Umverteilen“ have made funds available for this project.

My visit this year showed me the two faces of Kenyan reality: the measureless poverty and on the other side the measureless energy and will-power. Many of the women who receive help from SOLWODI-Kenya achieve so much with so little. Like Nora who set up a small business with four bottles of nail varnish, like Milcah's „Hair and Beauty Salon“ next to the vegetable stand: these and other success can be found in my Travel Report 2006, which can be ordered by phoning 06741-2232 or per email to [info@solwodi.de](mailto:info@solwodi.de).

### Greetings from Ostalb



„It was wonderful to see you, hear you and speak to your again. It has really helped our group! We'll continue supporting with all our power“. Those words arrived per

email from the SOLWODI-Workgroup Ostalb. Sister Lea had been invited to lecture at the Volkshoch School in Goeppingen by the active voluntary group, Ostalb, as part of the programme „ways into the future“.

### Volunteers needed

Katja Leonhardt, who used to be Sister Lea's personal assistant, will be leading a new SOLWODI office in Munich starting January 2007. We are looking for volunteers to support her. Whether through public relations work, the organising of events, administrative work or being creative - there are lots of ways in which to help as a volunteer. Anyone interested in helping out voluntarily at SOLWODI Munich should contact the SOLWODI headquarters in Boppard. Katja Leonhardt will then contact you at the beginning of the new year.

## „Forced marriage is a modern form of slavery“

By Cornelia Filter

„Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses“, according to the general agreement on human rights. German law also guarantees the freedom of entering into a marriage. But reality paints a different picture – both here in Germany and world wide. That’s why the UNO has condemned forced marriage as a “modern form of slavery”.

Neither Islam nor Christianity tolerates forced marriages, but religion is often used as an excuse. In Germany it is usually young Moslem women who are affected. But also female Aramaeans from Turkey or Syria, orthodox Romanies, protestant Africans, Buddhists from Thailand, Vietnam und Sri Lanka are forced to marry against their will. It’s hard to estimate just how many cases there are in Germany, due to lack of data. A study carried out on behalf of the Berlin Senate in more than 50 youth and counselling centres reported 230 cases in 2002. In the Berlin crisis centre, Papatya, every fourth client is a victim of forced marriage. In the Stuttgart communal project Rosa, roughly ten victims of forced marriage are given accommodation per month. The Turkish Association in Berlin-Brandenburg (TBB) suspects that up to one half of the marriages amongst migrants in Germany are forced marriages.

Experts agree that the number of unreported cases is high and rising. SOLWODI can confirm this trend. While forced marriage is not our central theme, the number of cases of forced marriages which we have taken on nearly tripled between 2003 and 2005. The draft for a law to prevent forced marriages, which was put forward cross-party by the Upper House to the Lower House, names a possible reason: „Forced marriage is often the attempt to discipline daughters who are growing up in western society and no longer want to follow old traditions.“ With drastic results. Papatya reports: 80 percent of girls and women who look for protection from forced marriage in the Berlin crisis centre have been mishandled or abused; 30 percent have thought of suicide. Two thirds of the victims coming to Papatya are underage. UNICEF criticises that „each year worldwide millions of girls are married before or during puberty“.

Although forced marriages often fulfil the definition of child abuse, constraint, unlawful detention, bodily harm or rape according to German law, only very few cases are prosecuted, “because forced marriage is not yet perceived by the public as being an offence worth persecuting“, the Upper House laments. At the moment the draft for the law is being examined by an advisory committee in the Lower House. The law to prevent forced marriages has a good chance of being passed, because the government has already signalled: “the coalition agreement between CDU, CSU and SPD from 11th November 2005 makes provision to prevent forced marriages and will examine all instruments to this end.”

Further information on:  
[www.zwangsheirat.de](http://www.zwangsheirat.de)

## For example Leila

By Sr. Dagmar Plum

In the entrance hall of a small station I meet the 16 year old school girl, we’ll call her Leila. She found SOLWODI via the internet. She didn’t want to say what the problem was on the phone. We go to a café where she starts to tell her story: in two weeks time she’s meant to be married to an 18 year old cousin. Leila is a yezidi Kurd. This small people – just half a million – lives spread across turkey and other Middle East countries. According to their country, the girl says, everyone is obliged to marry a blood relative to „strengthen the community“.

Leila was born in Germany, goes to school here. She dislikes her cousin and is in love with a different young man with whom she has slept. That makes her a potential victim of a murder of honour. She doesn’t want to know about surgical methods of restoring the hymen because she wants to stand by her boyfriend and stay with him. That means she has to leave her family. Perhaps forever. „I don’t know if I can hold out. With no parents, brothers and sisters and family celebrations“, she says sadly.

Was should she do? Hide away in a women’s shelter? Or in a shelter for girls? Leila is afraid she will feel locked in. „In my culture there are enough things which are prohibited for women. There’s always a wall somewhere you find yourself up against. It doesn’t matter which way you decide to go, backing away from the wall or breaking through – it hurts either way.“

## Police pilgrimage with a visit to SOLWODI



In order to minimise the suffering of victims and to improve the prosecution of the offenders, close cooperation between SOLWODI and the „police at all levels“ is required. That was the joint opinion at the end of a discussion on trafficking in women which was held in Boppard-Hirzenach between Sister Lea Ackermann and 20 policemen and policewomen from Sachsen together with the dean of Sachsen’s police, the priest Bernhard Wentzel.

Sister Lea’s guests had been on the police pilgrimage 2006. Around 400 police officers from all over Germany had joined together on 24<sup>th</sup> September to visit Koblenz under the motto “come and see”. Professional ethics has been taught at the Police College in Sachsen since 1996 by catholic and evangelic ministers. Because they are independent, they can act as persons of trust for police in crisis situations – they bring the news of someone’s death and help support victims – although not yet supporting trafficking victims, but: „perhaps that will come, too“, hopes Sister Lea. Upon their return to their places of work, they sent their greetings: “we’d like to thank you again for the pleasant and very interesting visit. We often talked about your work in the days that followed”.

## Good News from Cosovo

„Lida is taking her exams next year“, so a delegation from the „Woman Wellness Center / Safe House“(WWC) in Peje in Cosovo told us during a visit to Boppard-Hirzenach. SOLWODI’s returnee programme cooperates with the NGO, which has been fighting men’s violence against women and girls since 1999. The WWC also offers courses for vocational qualification. Our returnee Lida is currently doing a course in hairdressing and is both „enthusiastic and successful”.



## Ketteler Prize for Sister Lea

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2006, the ZASS Foundation (“Foundation Future for Work and Social Welfare”), set up by the catholic workers association (KAB) will be awarding the Ketteler Prize for the first time. Prize winner is Sister Lea Ackermann. The eulogy will be held by Cardinal Karl Lehmann, Bishop of Mainz and chairman of the German Bishops Conference.

The prize is named after the legendary „Workers’ Bishop of Mainz“ Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler (1811-1877), who, through his passionate support for the proletariat, founded catholic social politics. It was due to Ketteler’s encouragement – e.g. via his rousing preaching on social issues in the cathedral of Mainz – that in 1848 the catholic workers’ organisations were founded, which later became the KAB. Today the KAB, with its 200,000 members, is the strongest workers’ organisation in Germany after the trade unions.

The ZASS Foundation will award the prize to „personalities who are committed to ensuring the future of work and/or social welfare“. Sister Lea will receive the prize, 10,000 Euros, for the first time, because she fights „for improving the situation of women from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Middle and Eastern Europe, who experience distress either in Germany or in their home countries“.

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Volksbank Koblenz Mittelrhein e.G.

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Sorting Code 570 900 00

BIC: GENODE51KOB

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