

Dear Friends of SOLWODI,

October marks the tenth birthday of our association in North Rhine-Westphalia (p.3). You are warmly invited to the celebration on 10th October in the Duisburg counselling centre and to the session "Involvement against Trafficking – 10 years of SOLWODI NRW" on 13th October. This session will take place in Franz Hitze House in Münster and will be opened by Prof. Dr. Fritz Köster with a talk on the theme "There is no good, except for the good one does. Women's dignity: themes of injustice, law and Christian values".

It is my particular concern to find an answer, together with like-minded people, to the question of what will happen to the state of ethics, given the rising demand for prostitution and the current boom in the construction of brothels... I cannot and I do not want to resign myself to the fact that women are consumer products who follow the law of the free market, degraded to mere objects and deprived of their human dignity. On page 2, I report on my trip with the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation to Bulgaria. There, I acknowledged once again the importance of cross-border, personal contacts in the struggle against human trafficking. In the Bulgarian capital city of Sofia we had the chance to visit two local NGOs, which deal with victims of women trafficking. These encounters are real opportunities to network with these organizations, so as to effectively support women who return to their home countries, and to work together with them on various levels, such as prevention. The public relations work of these NGOs is important to raise the awareness of women and girls, so that they will not be exploited by ruthless traffickers.

In conclusion, I would like to recommend the article on page 4 in which a SOLWODI-worker presents a critique of aid agencies, in view of their failure to harness the commitment of young people. We are also addressed - and we should take this to heart.

Yours, Sr. Lea

Four success stories

In summer, we received "success stories" from three counselling centres. Before being taken by force to Germany, Olga* was raped by a public prosecutor and a policeman, and forced into prostitution for eight years. "When Olga came to us two years ago," writes a SOLWODI-counsellor, "she was so traumatized, that she did not leave the house alone and fled into her room as soon as she heard the voice of a man". Thanks to therapy and one-to-one private lessons from a volunteer school teacher, she is now ready to go to school. Olga, who would like to become a dressmaker, has been promised a place in the textile manufacturing class of a vocational school.

Elena* had been kept prisoner in a German brothel for five months. She managed to escape and subsequently was a witness in eight criminal proceedings. At the end of August, she completed her voluntary social year in a home for disabled people. "The daily interaction with severely disabled young people made her happy and strengthened her self-confidence", reports a SOLWODI-counsellor of another counselling centre. "And in May she married her boyfriend. We were at the wedding as her 'surrogate family'".

Another counselling centre wrote: "One of our women has finished her training as a nursery school teacher with good results, and is now doing her practical year. Another woman has successfully concluded the integrative course and, after a complementary course in nursing, has now found a placement in a hospital. Her goal is to become a general or a geriatric nurse."

**Names changed*



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With the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation in Sofia

By Sr. Dr. Lea Ackermann

The Institute for International Contact and Co-operation (IBZ), which belongs to the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation, organizes conferences on human trafficking once a year in Central and Eastern Europe, to which Sister Lea Ackermann is also regularly invited. In July 2007, the venue was the Bulgarian capital city Sofia.

Bulgaria is one of the main countries from which women and children are trafficked to Western Europe. Since 1998, this issue has been taken up by the Animus Association Foundation, founded in 1994 in Sofia as a drop-in centre for victims of violence. Since then, this local NGO, which we visited before the conference, has received 400 victims of human trafficking. It has employed 30 workers (25 of whom have a fixed salary), and currently runs a counselling centre, a safe house and a telephone hotline, which is busy round the clock.

The second local NGO to which we paid a visit was the Nadja Centre Foundation, founded in 1995 by women medical doctors, psychologists and lawyers to address growing violence against women. Currently, ten employees and 20 volunteers, with expertise in psychotherapy, social work and law, work in the Nadja Centre. Till now, Nadja

has been able to help 400 victims of domestic violence and 27 victims of human trafficking.

Both NGOs also held talks at the conference on human trafficking on 6th July. Moreover, representatives of the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, the Attorney General and the General Direction against Organized Criminality (OK), as well as Boyko Borissov, the mayor of Sofia, spoke from the Bulgarian perspective. The German situation was explained by Georg Schmid (Secretary of State of the Bavarian Ministry of Interior), Dr. Rainer Gepperth (head of IBZ), Prof. Ursula Männle (vice president of the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation), Dr. Wilhelm Schmidbauer (Chief of police in Munich), Manfred Paulus (former police officer, author), Klaus Bayerl (Chief of the Augsburg criminal police), Christina Toteva-Vasselinova (JADWIGA) and myself.

At conferences the informal talks during the breaks are perhaps more important than the official presentations. In this way, over a cup of coffee, I could describe to one of the Animus workers, the case of a SOLWODI client who had to return to her home country and was urgently in need of help. The Animus worker promised to get in touch with her and to give her the 200 Euro, which I had brought for her to help with her immediate needs.

In order to effectively fight human trafficking, these cross-border meetings are needed, so as to come to know people personally, to develop strategies together and to support one another. Not only does this pertain to NGOs, but also to meetings with politicians, the police and representatives of the judicial system. A heartfelt thanks to the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation, which makes this possible every year!

“Crossing Boundaries”

This motto accompanied the second ecumenical city day of the Rhine Neckar metropolitan region which took place from 30th June to 1st July, in Mannheim. In a shared stand, SOLWODI Ludwigshafen and the ecumenical project “Prostitution and Women Trafficking” of Kaiserslautern informed people about forced prostitution. The contacts with passers-by were facilitated with the help of a quiz. Information about women’s circumstances had to be matched to the respective regions in Germany. A women’s *breakfast* from the Evangelical Deanery Ludwigshafen was offered as the prize.

We invite you to join the next meeting of the project-group “Prostitution and Women Trafficking” on 30th October, at 5 p.m., Heinz-Wilhelmy-House, Unionstr. 1 in Kaiserslautern. Contact: Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Bildung und Gesellschaft Kaiserslautern, Women’s department, Barbara Kohlstruck, tel. 0631-3642235.

“Tremendously important work”

In 2007 SOLWODI was present, as it is every year, at the Rhineland-Palatinate Day. It was organized in Baumholder from 28th June to 1st July with the motto “60 years of US-armed forces in Rhineland-Palatinate”. Baumholder is a small town of 4000 people, where the biggest US-army base in Germany was established shortly after the war. 100.000 visitors streamed to this RP-Day in Baumholder. Unfortunately, interaction with those interested in the work of SOLWODI was at times impossible. We were assigned a tent within the women’s projects exhibition area, directly next to a big stage, where music and theatre productions were being performed. All the women’s groups which took part in the exhibition were interviewed on the same stage. Sr. Dagmar Plum from Koblenz took charge of this part of the program on behalf of SOLWODI.

Soon after, the Prime Minister of Rhineland-Palatinate Kurt Beck visited the SOLWODI tent and thanked us for our “tremendously important work”. In spite of the noise, we understood that – and were pleased about it.



A day with Sister Leoni

By Cornelia Filter

SOLWODI North Rhine-Westphalia e.V. celebrates its tenth anniversary in October. This was the reason for a visit to Sister Leoni Beving, vice president of the association and leader of the counselling centre in Duisburg.



Sr. Leoni collected me from the train station, although she did not really have time. A social worker was on vacation, another had Friday off, the educator was away for further training, and the accountant works only from Tuesday to Thursday. The SOLWODI team in Duisburg consists of five people; however, some of them work only part-time, because there is not enough money for full-time employment.

Despite the fact that a volunteer student takes charge of the telephone service on Friday afternoons, Sister Leoni is like a cat on a hot tin roof, as I interview her. She is worried about a woman, a victim of people trafficking from a safe house in Duisburg. The young woman has to undergo a cardiac catheterization under general anaesthetic. A worker accompanied her to the hospital. Sister Leoni will visit her again later. "Definitely!"

Leoni Beving, born in 1940, grew up in Münsterland. Early in life, she already decided to join a religious order. She is a pastoral assistant and educator. Previously she took care of neglected youth, and today she works with women deprived of their dignity. Since the start of the

SOLWODI centre in Duisburg in 1997, its dedicated team has already counselled and supported more than 1000 victims of human trafficking, forced prostitution, and forced marriage.

Sister Leoni describes the birth of SOLWODI NRW e.V. in 1996.

At that time, a women's network from Duisburg—an association of church, political and autonomous women's groups—organized a conference for experts to discuss the theme "Women and Girls Trafficking". On the suggestion of the Catholic Women's Association Germany, Sr. Lea Ackermann was invited. At the end of the conference, a question was raised. "Would it be possible to have a SOLWODI counselling centre in Duisburg also"? "Yes", said Sr. Lea, "I also know someone who could direct it". She meant the Hiltrup Missionary Sister Leoni Beving, who wanted to explore new job opportunities and had just completed a placement year at SOLWODI in Boppard and Koblenz. "But we have no money", continued Sr. Lea. "Do not worry, we will help you!" promised the women's network, and they kept their word.

Till today Sister Leoni can rely on these "tight networks". Her work with the local authorities of Duisburg as well as with the authorities of North Rhine Westphalia has been a positive experience. "Through the EU-enlargement and the law on prostitution, however, things have now changed", says Sister Leoni with concern. Because of the new

legal situation, the police now hardly have the opportunity to gain access to victims of human trafficking and to free them. Before, 80 percent of our clients came to us through the police, today it's under ten percent". Sister Leoni fears that the victims of trafficking in women "will now become altogether invisible".

On our way back to the train station, she shows me the expanding red-light quarter. "All around Vulkan Street more and more establishments are being set up with commercial rooms to rent", the NRZ recently reported. Sister Leoni knows what such rental contracts look like. "They are so clever that legally they cannot be cracked". In other words, the landlords always have a clean slate even when foreign minors have to turn tricks in their rooms.

As I get out of Sister Leoni's car at the train station, she puts a letter she wrote to the editor into my hand for me to read on my way home. "Prostitution will be increasingly perceived as a normal job, prostitutes as legal consumer products," I read on the train. "The question remains, how will a society be able to deal

with a changing set of values, which degrade women, turning them into mere objects".

Indeed, this question remains...

A longer version of this article can be found at www.solwodi.de (in: "Rundbriefe")

Wednesday, 10 October, 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m., Jubilee Celebration at SOLWODI Duisburg, Catholic Family Educational Institution, Innenhafen, Wieberplatz 2, 47051 Duisburg. The official speech will be delivered by Inge Bell, who has been nominated "Lady Europe 2007" because of her journalistic and social commitment against women trafficking and forced prostitution.

Saturday, 13 October, 9:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., "Get involved against women trafficking – 10 years SOLWODI NRW", Conference with Sr. Dr. Lea Ackermann, Leoni Beving and Prof. Dr. Fritz Köster in the Catholic Social Academy Franz-Hitze-Haus in Münster, Kardinal-von-Galen-Ring 50. Info under www.franz-hitze-haus.de. Registration to Cornelia Zahn. Tel: 0251-9818445. Fax: 0251-9818480. E-Mail: zahn@franz-hitze-haus.de

Women trafficking – (not) a topic for young people?

By Julia Klein

20-year old Julia Klein did a placement with SOLWODI right after her high school graduation. In the following text she reflects on the “youth-free” public opinion work of aid agencies, and describes what encouraged her to become involved with these issues.

According to UN estimates, 2 million women and girls worldwide are forced into prostitution; UNICEF speaks of 2 million prostituted children yearly. These numbers frighten me and make me shake my head in disbelief. I cannot imagine such a life at all! And had the World Cup not taken place a year ago, and along with it the campaign against women trafficking, I would still not know anything about it or have even thought about it.

What happened to me happens to many young people. The prejudiced belief that young people are indifferent to social evils is unjust. The majority of us are just unaware of the atrocities that take place behind our backs, because the public opinion work of many aid agencies does not target our age group.

Yet, it is enormously important to trigger off thinking processes in young people, so that new clients of prostitutes will not be recruited from our ranks. Moreover,

many registered minor victims, according to the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), come from Germany—thus, the danger faces us too! We young women are affected by the very fact that women trafficking and forced prostitution humiliates and puts down all female individuals, no matter what their age.

After being so shaken by it, I could not keep silent anymore. So I organized exhibitions and talks on women trafficking in my school and found that my classmates were also very interested. Many more young people would commit themselves, if they were given a chance and if someone made an effort to address them. As a high school student I often had the feeling that people would not trust that my friends and I could contribute to this cause. But who, if not we, should carry on the work of aid agencies?



Official Speech as a Download

Sister Lea Ackermann (here with the Regional Governor Gabi Burgsteller and Archbishop Alois Kochgasser) held a highly regarded official speech at the University of Salzburg in the general auditorium for the closing of the Salzburger university week. The talk on the theme of “The Powerlessness of the Powerful—The Power of the Powerless” can be downloaded at www.solwodi.de (in “Öffentlichkeitsarbeit”).

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