

SOLWODI

Solidarity with
women in distress

Solidarität mit
Frauen in Not

Newsletter

No. 87, April 2011

Dear Friends of SOLWODI,

With remarkable stories from the world of the opera, blossoming news about our upcoming activities and the haunting sides of our work, this newest edition of our circular letter will let you know more about the different challenges SOLWODI has to face every day. At the beginning of this year I had the pleasure of meeting the internationally active opera director Bruno Berger-Gorski for the second time. On page 2 you will read about our encounter in Trier and why I have the impression that this man has become a fellow campaigner of our organization. In the following months we can expect many interesting beneficial events and beautiful flowers when the German Federal Garden Show will open its gates in Koblenz. SOLWODI will be present on this impressive garden show with some events in the spring and summer time. You will find more information about the event on page 2.

It is not only at a garden show where growth can be observed. With the "Stella" project SOLWODI was able to open the 15th counselling centre in Germany at the beginning of this year (see below).

The projects in Kenya have also grown since our last circular letter in December 2010. The soccer team of SOLASA was able to buy a second Tuk-Tuk (small taxi) and the water rucksack called "Paul" arrived in Mombasa where it is being of great use (see page 4).

But not everything in life is developing as good and well as one may hope. Sometimes we have to be very patient before we can see a light at the end of the tunnel. Elena came to SOLWODI over ten years ago and we have been taking care of her ever since. The young woman from Lithuania made terrible experiences in our country and is still suffering from a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Her story on page 3 shows that it is worthwhile to hold on, even when progress is slow.

Last, but not least I would like to thank all supporters of SOLWODI. Without your help, our work could not be done. Representatively for all our supporters I would like to name the Order of the Ursulines who celebrated their 475th anniversary last year and presented SOLWODI with a very special present following our 25th anniversary (see page 4).

We very much hope that all our friends will continue to support SOLWODI and thereby enable us to provide help for women and children in need. I wish you a pleasant and inspiring spring. Maybe we will have the opportunity to meet up in person at the German Federal Garden Show in blossoming Koblenz.

Yours, Sister Lea



Content

SOLWODI is growing: The "Stella" project in Aachen
Page 1

"Lakme" an Indian woman that ends up in flames
Page 2

Speaking out at the German Federal Garden Show
Page 2

Terrible experiences: Elena is still fighting her memories
Page 3

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – a definition
Page 3

PAUL's arrival in Kenya
Page 4

Great support by a fellow celebratee
Page 4

Imprint
Page 4



- Ein starker Partner im Land -

SOLWODI is kindly supported by the Rhineland-Palatinate's Lottery Foundation, for which we would like to express our sincere thanks.

SOLWODI is growing: The "Stella" project in Aachen

In January 2011 the SOLWODI family grew by the 15th counselling centre in Germany and 3rd in North Rhine-Westphalia: The "Stella" project is being financed by the German organization "Aktion Mensch". The director of this new project, Ms. Roshan Heiler, is being supported by 2 colleagues. Part of their offer is psycho-social counselling and support to migrant women who have become victims of human trafficking, forced prostitution or forced marriage. The colleagues in Aachen also offer support to prostitutes who are willing to leave prostitution by helping them to receive education and find a job. To contact our new team in Aachen, please call +49/ 241-413 1747-11, fax +49/ 241-413 1747-13 or e-mail to aachen@solwodi.de

"Lakme" an Indian woman that ends up in flames

Women who are caught between two different cultures often suffer. In the worst case they even lose their life like Lakmé, the daughter of a Hindu priest, who dies in the flames. The opera, composed by Leo Delibes, was named after its leading role and shown in the theatre in Trier from January to March. The director was Bruno Berger-Gorski who is not only active on stages around the world but also known for taking on sociocritical subjects. He already proved this very impressively when he directed "Rigoletto" in Bonn last year and addressed prostitution, sexual abuse and human trafficking in his screenplay. In Trier the main subject was the role of women in India. Bruno Berger-Gorski, who had directed the opera "Tosca" in Mumbai last autumn, integrated the experiences he made in India into "Lakmé" and transferred the scene of action from 1883, when the opera was staged for the first time, into today's India. Sr. Lea got an impression of that when she was invited to the Theatre Café in Trier as an expert. She had already had the

impression that Bruno Berger-Gorski was a fellow campaigner of SOLWODI, when she saw his interpretation of "Rigoletto" in Bonn. This is why it made her very happy that Berger-Gorski pointed out the problems of many women again with "Lakmé" to fight against their miserable situation.

Lakmé dies in the flames. This is a fate that she is sharing with many other Indian women. They are being burnt by others or burn themselves because they see no other way out of their misery. According to Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, authors of the book "Half the Sky" (published 2010) every two hours a bride burning takes place in India. The reasons are varied. Some burn their wives so that they can marry another woman, others want to punish the family of the bride for an insufficient dowry. Even though dowry payments are illegal since



Sr. Lea Ackermann in conversation with director Bruno Berger-Gorski (left), art director Gerhard Weber and dramatic advisor Peter Larsen (right)

1961, the law that forbids them is either unknown or simply ignored in many regions of India. As many women in India are illiterate, they are unable to stand up for the application of this law. But meanwhile resistance is forming with the organization "Pink Women".

The greed for money by their in-laws is the main reason why these women are being put under pressure. If the brides' families are not able to meet their demands for money, a new car or a TV set, the brides are being tortured or even killed.

Speaking out at the German Federal Garden Show

SOLWODI seldom says things in a roundabout way or "through the flower" as we say in Germany. But with the Federal Garden Show so close to our headquarters we cannot resist to mingle with the other visitors and admire the beautiful garden settings.

From April 15th to October 16th the city of Koblenz hosts the garden show with the motto "2011 is our summer". SOLWODI will be part of the program several times. Sr. Lea will present the work of SOLWODI on the "Women's Day at the Garden Show", taking place on May 4th, 04:00 p.m. on the

"Rhineland-Palatinate Stage" at the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein.

The fortress of Ehrenbreitstein will also host an exhibition titled "Lost in the human forest" (Vergessen im Menschenwald) from June 30th to July 17th. The opening reception will take place on June 30th at 06:00 p.m. with a concert by Loraine and Marlon Reinhardt. The visual examination of the subject trafficking in women was developed by Marion Pfeifer in 2010 and will be presented in cooperation with "Church on the Federal Garden Show".

In addition to this exhibition, Sr. Lea will be reading from the new

book "Living in freedom had only been a dream" (In Freiheit leben, das war lange nur ein Traum) on July 14th, 06:00 p.m. at the church. This event will be accompanied by the musicians Loraine Reinhardt and Romano Säger.

July 17th, a Sunday, will then be SOLWODI's day on the Rhineland-Palatinate Stage. Starting from 11:00 a.m. and ending at 05:00 p.m. (with a break from 02:00 to 03:00 p.m.) SOLWODI will present an interesting program with information about our work, a play and a lot of music by Django Reinhardt and other musicians.

Terrible experiences: Elena is still fighting her memories

Terrible experiences leave traces that often last for years. In the worst cases they last a whole lifetime. Elena (name changed) is fighting her memories and the traces the experiences left on her life. The woman from Lithuania is traumatized and suffers from a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to the psychological and physical violence she has been exposed to. SOLWODI has been by Elena's side for over ten years.

The 29 year old woman is not an exceptional case. Every day our colleagues working in the counselling centres and shelters are taking care of women from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and South-America, who have become victims of human trafficking, forced prostitution or forced marriages, many of them with several traumata. The work with traumatised women acquires intuition and above all a special knowledge which the personnel of SOLWODI gains through courses with trauma experts.

Now back to Elena. She comes from a small village in Lithuania. When she was 19, a fellow countryman lured her into coming to Germany. When she arrived, she was raped and sold to a brothel in Northern Germany. Elena refused to do the things that were expected from her, so the traffickers brought her to Southern Germany. The men threatened Elena with a gun, beat her up and forced her to prostitute herself in private homes and forests. She had to satisfy her clients in 10-minute intervals. With no passport, no money and no knowledge of the German language she was completely exposed to her tormentors.

When one day she heard those man making plans about killing her and selling her organs, she escaped – despite her anxiety, the uncertainty and the danger. A passerby on the street saw her and brought her to the police. A few days later she came to SOLWODI. All she wanted was to

go back home, but this was impossible. Elena had heard that her kidnappers were searching for her in Lithuania and had even been putting her parents under pressure.

treated at a clinic and later moved to a therapeutic living community.

In 2004 she met a man, they moved in with each other and later got married. Elena had great problems in

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – a definition

"Traumaleitfaden" (Trauma Guide) is a book that SOLWODI colleague and psychologist Eva Schaab wrote together with psychologist and private lecturer Dr. Markos Maragkos for the Federal Criminal Agency. It was published in 2009 and is meant for the use by official authorities. The authors describe the post-traumatic stress disorder, which can occur weeks or months after a traumatic experience. Some of its symptoms are: reliving of parts of the traumatic experiences, for example through repeating dreams or unwanted, very intensive and stressing memories; avoiding of thoughts, feelings or situations that are directly or indirectly connected to the traumatic experience, for example by trying not to think or talk about the experience; continuing physical overexcitement that can lead to raised excitability and alertness, nervousness, difficulties to concentrate and insomnia.

SOLWODI took her into a shelter where she stayed for 8 months. Hopelessness, anxiety and nightmares were torturing the young woman. In the first weeks she was very quiet, ate very little and almost didn't sleep. After a while she was slowly able to trust the SOLWODI personnel.

Elena is a brave woman. With the help of SOLWODI she decided to testify as a witness in the lawsuit against her tormentors so that they could be punished for what they had done to her. There were 8 trials in the time between 2002 and 2004. A torture but at the same time a great success for Elena. Her traffickers, rapists and pimps, altogether 11 men and one woman were finally sentenced.

By the time of this court decision, Elena was already living in her own little flat. In the meantime she had received a long-term residence permit and a work permit for Germany. She tried to work as a kitchen help but had to quit the job after a few weeks because she could not bear to see the cook working with knives. Her former tormentors were still present in her thoughts, feelings and dreams. Elena was suicidal. She was

dealing with her relationship because of the traumatizing experiences she had made in the past. Her feelings alternated between hate and helplessness, a state that was very difficult for her husband. Because of the violence she had experienced, she began to harm herself. She cut her skin and burnt it with cigarettes. When asked about the reason, she stated that she could only stand the pain she felt inside, if the outside of her body was also in pain.

Elena tried an out-patient treatment but failed. When her marriage was about to break up she accepted the proposal from SOLWODI to get treated in a clinic that specializes on trauma patients. It was there that she finally understood what had happened and what was going on inside of her. The following out-patient treatment with a trauma specialist helped her to get on with her daily life and solve the problems in her relationship. Today she is working as a carer for the elderly, a job that makes her happy. She has learnt not to look back on her suffering but to look forward and trust people again.

PAUL's arrival in Kenya

PAUL, the water-rucksack developed by the University of Kassel, that was given to SOLWODI as a present for the 25-year-anniversary, finally arrived in Africa. When she travelled to Kenya in December, Sr. Lea took PAUL to its destination and saw for herself that the rucksack is fully functional. She was the first one to try the drinking water filtered by the device. According to Sr. Lea the water tastes very good. The water filtering system is now used in Kaloleni, a slum area in Mombasa. Many of the women that are being supported by SOLWODI Kenya live there with their families. The slums are often affected by cholera and diphtheria. Clean water is a scarce commodity.



Sr. Lea stayed in Kenya from December 4th to 11th and visited the various initiatives there. Representatives of SOLGIDI (project for daughters of prostitutes), SOLASA (soccer players), COGICHI (water project) as well as representatives of 6 SOLWODI support groups and the HIV-group came to report about their work and problems. Sr. Lea also met the new manager of SOLWODI Kenya, Maureen Karissa, and talked to the other members of the newly elected board.



A special pleasure for Sr. Lea was the purchase of a second Tuk Tuk (small taxi). She had already bought the first one when she visited Mombasa in the summer of 2010. The Tuk Tuk is meant as a source of income for the female soccer players. The purchase of the Tuk Tuks was made possible through donations by Prof. Dr. Ursula Männle (politician for the Christian Social Union and social scientist) and the Catholic Women Society from the deanery of Königswinter, especially their chairwoman Ursula Voll.

475th anniversary of the Ursuline Order: Great support by a fellow celebratee

Good things arise when two celebratees come together. On the occasion of its 25th anniversary, SOLWODI received great support from the Ursuline Order who celebrated its 475th anniversary in 2010. The internationally active catholic community has generously supported our organization by collecting donations for SOLWODI on many of the events in their schools and convents in German-speaking areas. Sr. Lea, who gave a lecture in Dorsten on October 1st during the central celebrations of the Ursulines in Northwestern Germany, and her SOLWODI team are very thankful for the donation.

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