

SOLWODI

Solidarity with
women in distress

Solidarität mit
Frauen in Not

Newsletter

No. 88, June 2011

Dear Friends of SOLWODI,

As you will see in the centre of this circular letter, we have chosen politics as a special topic this time. Since the passing of the prostitution bill in 2002, prostitution was no longer considered immoral, but seen as a normal job with social insurance payments instead. The result of this legal change was that the police had even less possibilities to find victims of human trafficking. The ones that profited from this new law were pimps and brothel owners. The new law gave them the possibility to legally open so-called wellness clubs which bring more money than normal brothels. Following an initiative by the German states of Baden-Württemberg and Saarland the Federal Council decided to introduce stricter regulations for prostitution again. We have written a statement concerning this council decision and sent it to the Federal Parliament. We hope that the politicians there will take our evaluation and claims into consideration, as they are based on our daily experiences. We are currently preparing another statement for the legal committee of the Federal Parliament. In March I was invited to speak before this committee as an expert on human trafficking.

It is a scandal if victims of human trafficking are still sentenced for offences against the immigration law (see page 3). But we also have good things to report: Many people came to the opening ceremony of our newest counselling centre in Aachen. The guests from public services, church and politics were very interested in our work. The other good news is that our counselling centre in Munich also found a new home. As always I would like to thank all of those who support us by donating or with voluntary work. We would not be able to do our work without your help. I wish you all a good summer.

Yours, Sister Lea

At the German Federal Garden Show (BUGA) with SOLWODI

The BUGA has arrived! The Federal Garden Show keeps Koblenz busy and we are very happy to be part of it. Our exhibition titled "Lost in the human forest" (Vergessen im Menschenwald) starts on June 30th with a vernissage and can be visited in the fortress church of Ehrenbreitstein until July 17th. The impressive pictures by Marion Pfeiffer will surely lead to vivid discussions about human trafficking. On July 14th at 6:00 p.m. Sr. Lea will be in the fortress church of Ehrenbreitstein again for a reading from our newest book "Living in freedom had only been a dream" (In Freiheit leben, das war lange nur ein Traum). On July 17th SOLWODI will be active at the BUGA for the whole day where we will present an interesting programme with information about our work, a play and a lot of music by Django Reinhardt and other musicians. We would be happy to welcome you there.



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

Important information

Dear donors, we would like to thank you for your support without which we would not be able to help the women in need. We will be happy to send you a receipt for donations of 50 Euros and more. For donations below 50 Euros, the tax office accepts the transfer receipt of your bank. Unfortunately some of the donations we receive do not include the full details, so that we are not able to relate them to a donor. Should you not receive a receipt for your donations starting from 50 Euros, please contact Mrs. Albrecht via phone (0049- (0)6741 – 2232) or e-mail:

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Federal Council: Stricter rules for places of prostitution

“The prostitution law makes the police helpless by assuming all parties to be on an equal level” says Wolfram Hohmann, chief inspector of the Stuttgart police (quotation taken from EMMA, thematic dossier “The woman as a commodity”, spring 2011).

This impact of the prostitution bill of 2002 has been known for a while. Federal Council finally took the action and agreed on an initiative for stricter rules in places of prostitution (printed matter 314/10, dated February 11, 2011). Although this decision does not criticize prostitution in its entirety it is still worth supporting as it aims at limiting possible damages. For example, the initiative contains the following:

In order for this resolution of the Federal Council to become a legislative initiative, the Parliament would have to react next. The Parliament is not obliged to do so, however chances increase if there is pressure from the outside, for example through statements concerning the matter. Law proposals can either be sent to the Parliament by the government or by parliamentary parties respectively a specific number of parliament members. For details on the legislative procedure please refer to article 70 and the following of the German Constitution.

“The authority of the police and the public affairs office does not suffice to protect prostitutes from degrading treatment and to provide effective, preventive and repressive actions against human trafficking, forced prostitution and illegal employment in red light districts.” For this reason the Federal Council demands the need of permission by official authorities among other things before the opening of every new brothel. The resolution also envisions a strict system for compulsory registrations. Concerning sexually transmitted diseases the Federal Council only mentions the use of condoms. We sent a comment to the relevant boards of the parliament in which we stated the following: “SOLWODI considers prostitution to be incompatible with human dignity. A human being should not be reduced to a

commodity.” We have also given a detailed comment concerning sexually transmitted diseases. One of our demands is a compulsive health check and more responsibility from health authorities. We also demand the minimum age for prostitutes to be raised to 21. This demand from SOLWODI is only based on the aspect of damage prevention, as we generally question prostitution being a “profession”. In addition we are demanding financial support for women who are willing to quit prostitution as in most cases they are in need of psychosocial support, accommodation, counselling, vocational training, interim aid, networking and a lot more. Counselling centres with experienced advisors are absolutely necessary to support the women in starting into a self-determined life. In all other aspects we consider the demands for control of pimps and brothel owners by the Federal Council initiative to be absolutely necessary.

Europe against human trafficking and violence against women

In **December 2010** the European Parliament enacted a guideline of “prevention and combat against human trafficking and for the protection of victims”. This guideline identifies human trafficking as a severe crime that interferes with several fundamental human rights. In Germany, human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is only considered to be an offense. Among other things the guideline demands to not hold victims responsible for crimes that they had been forced to do or be part of, for example if they were given a falsified passport. The guideline is legislative and the member states of the EU have to implement them into their national laws within the time of two years.

At the beginning of **April 2011** the European Parliament took on the following decision: Sexual violence against women and rape shall be considered as a crime by all member states of the EU and automatically lead to prosecution. To date, rape is not considered a crime in several member states. The decision about “the priorities and basic principles of new EU politics to fight violence against women” is non-legislative, which means that it is only a suggestion to the member states of the EU.

In **May 2011** the European Commission presented a combination with measures of protection for victims. The aim is to bring the different laws of the member states concerning the protection of victims to the same level.

A wrong signal: A county court condemns a victim of trafficking

“It is with great consternation that we have heard from our Nigerian client and read in the newspaper, that she who was willing to testify against her punishers and her boyfriend have been convicted by the county court for “illegal immigration to and habitation in Germany” respectively the assistance to do so.“ Those were the opening words of a protest letter we wrote to the president of a county court. Here is what had happened before:

In June 2009 traffickers brought a 24 year old Nigerian woman to Germany. They had promised her legal work but when they arrived here, they took away her passport and forced her into prostitution. They told her that she had to pay back “debts” of 40,000 Euros. She was threatened with Voodoo and was so scared that she did whatever her “madam”, a female pimp, told her to do. After a while she told a client about her situation and he was brave enough to take her with him and give her a shelter and protection. Now her madam wanted 90,000 Euros to set the woman free. The man contacted the police and encouraged the woman to testify against the traffickers. Thanks to his courage and support, the traffickers were brought before court.

His engagement was not rewarded though. He had to pay a civil penalty

of 1,000 Euros because he had given shelter to an illegal immigrant. And the Nigerian woman had to pay a penalty of 675 Euros for being an illegal immigrant. “Although she was a victim and had considerably contributed to the arrest of the traffickers”, Soni Unterreithmeier from SOLWODI in Augsburg says frustrated. The criminal police also feel sorry for the convictions of the Nigerian woman and her boyfriend.

“We are worried about the signalling effect of this conviction. Obviously the victims must now fear to be accused of being offenders” says Soni Unterreithmeier who always tries to assure the women that they can trust the authorities and helps them to testify before court. The conviction is also a slap in the face for the boyfriend of the woman. “He rescued the woman and therewith put himself into great danger. He gave her

shelter and money, accompanied her to the police and encouraged her. This way he contributed to the clarification of a crime”. The Nigerian woman appealed against the conviction. After living in a SOLWODI shelter for a few months she now got a limited residence permit because of endangerment in her home country. SOLWODI continues to support her in learning German and planning her future, so that she can lead a self-responsible life. The county courts that we had sent our statement to referred us to the decision-making authority of the judges. “Nevertheless I still think that it was the right decision to inform the presidents of the courts” says Soni Unterreithmeier. A copy of our letter was forwarded to the regular judge...

A ground to walk on



There is enough poverty in Mombasa already. SOLWODI was informed, that about 4000 people living in a small village near Mombasa are now in danger of losing their homes. Reportedly a tycoon bought the whole area from the government to build a large plant there. Amongst many others, Emily also built a house there with the help of SOLWODI. Back then she had the permission of the government. The case has already been brought to court. We will do whatever we can to support Emily and the other people that are affected by this matter.

More light in the dark

SOLWODI Munich has moved. Our colleagues in Munich now hope that the light rooms in the Dachauer Street No. 50 will help them bring more light into the dark pasts of our clients. “The situation of sexually exploited girls and women has changed for the worse in the past years” said Bernhard Feiner, chief of the police department for trafficking and enforced prostitution, during the opening ceremony. “Don’t look away!” That was the unanimous appeal for more engagement by the guests from politics and authorities. Our counselling centre in Munich already has a good network of other organisations that work in similar fields to ours.



Project “Stella”



With the so-called “Stella-project” our 15th counselling centre was officially opened in Aachen on April 15th. Roshan Heiler and two other colleagues had been working there already since January.

SOLWODI: Hello Roshan. What are the goals for this new counselling centre? Had there been any concrete calls for a counselling centre in this area before?

Roshan Heiler: Aachen did not have any counselling activities for women in prostitution before and was looking for ways to open a centre. Together with the city of Aachen we sent an application to “Aktion Mensch” (German charity project) which was accepted. Our aim is to approach the women with migration background who are prostituting themselves, to help them with all their problems and to assist them in leaving prostitution if they are willing to do so.

SOLWODI: How was the opening ceremony? Were any prominent guests invited?

Roshan Heiler: The ceremony was very interesting and brought many contacts for possible future cooperation. Some of the guests were for example vicar-general Manfred von Holtum of the diocese Aachen, representatives of politics police and Sr. Lea, of course. I was very surprised and happy to see, that apart from the invited guests many other interested people attended the ceremony.

SOLWODI: What is it exactly that you offer to the women?

Roshan Heiler: Apart from the counselling we also do street work. This makes it possible for us to get in direct contact with the women that might need our help. We can also bring the women to one of our SOLWODI shelters if necessary.

SOLWODI: Unfortunately money is often a serious subject in such cases. How is the project financed?

Roshan Heiler: “Aktion Mensch“ supports us by paying 70% of our costs for 3 years. We also get donations and the diocese Aachen was a big support by letting us use some of their rooms as our office. We are already discussing about the possibilities to win the city of Aachen as a supporter for our finances in the future. Some volunteers are currently trying to build up a network of doctors for the medical support of the women.

SOLWODI: How many women have contacted you for help since January and what were their situations?

Roshan Heiler: We were able to support 20 women by now. Most of them have health problems or want to get leave prostitution and need legal advice.

SOLWODI: Dear Roshan, thank you very much for your time!



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