

# SOLWODI

Solidarity with  
women in distress

Solidarität mit  
Frauen in Not

**Newsletter**  
No. 93, September 2012



## Dear Friends of SOLWODI,

15 August 2012 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my promise to devote myself to following Jesus. For 50 years I have belonged to the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa. It has been a colorful life with many stops in Europe and Africa. My commitment to women and children in violent situations (SOLWODI) has thereby become my heartfelt concern.

It is a scandal how the trafficking of women and children thrives. Until today it shocks me that these crimes are not consistently cracked down upon even in Germany. Quite the contrary since the massive lay-offs in the police force (known to be 18,000 jobs) has made the fight against human trafficking almost impossible. The already high levels of unreported human trafficking and forced prostitution cases today will continue to rise and the perpetrators held less accountable. We at SOLWODI have gotten particularly to know the victims, many of whom come from Romania. We ask ourselves the question: "How is it for the women in their home countries?" and as a result we begin a new series "To be a woman in..." In this series we want to highlight the lives of women in different countries – albeit from the inside: Young journalists will write about their home. Although special attention is given here to issues that are particularly important to SOLWODI, this is not exclusively the case. We would like to bring you closer to understanding what it means to go your own way as a woman in for example Kenya, Brazil, Georgia or even Romania (see page 3). For all the problems we are aware of through SOLWODI's work with Romanian trafficking and forced prostitution victims, the report from Romania also demonstrates that "women move the world". This is the title of the book from actress Iris Berben. I met her for an interview in early August at the Stolzenfels Castle during a reading (see page 2). Women move the world – with this insight, today I would like to especially thank the women who continue to help in SOLWODI's work (see page 4). Keep it up!

*Yours, Sister Lea*

## Content

**German Prostitution Act promotes human trafficking and forced prostitution**  
Page 1

**Sister Lea meets the actress Iris Berben**  
Page 2

**The Court – surrender to the machinations of the perpetrators**  
Page 2

**To be a woman in ... Romania**  
Page 3

**At SOLWODI all are helped: Thank you for the big steps...**  
Page 4

**...and thanks for many small steps**  
Page 4

**Münz Company Run in Koblenz on 22 June 2012**  
Page 4

**Imprint**  
Page 4

## **German Prostitution Act promotes human trafficking and forced prostitution**

*Sister Lea Ackermann as an expert in the Bundestag*

That the Prostitution Act of 2002 has failed in its goal of improving the situation of prostitutes was the unanimous opinion of experts at an open dialogue in Berlin in mid June. "With the Prostitution Act of 2002, prostitution has been played down, the women in prostitution left without rights and protection," said Sister Lea. "The position of the police and the law enforcement agencies of the state has since been significantly weakened, while the legal position of the pimp has been strengthened and upgraded." Since 2002, brothel owners and pimps are regarded as ordinary employers, with managerial authority over the prostitutes as workers. Precisely what this authority entails, however, is not well defined, criticized Sister Lea. It leads in practice to control, coercion and degrading conditions for women in prostitution and dramatically restricts the action available to the judiciary. Thus flat rate brothels attract visitors with offerings such as: 1 Woman, 1 beer, 1 sausage all inclusive for EUR 8.90.

According to SOLWODI's records, Germany has become the Eldorado of human trafficking 10 years after introducing the Prostitution Act. To change this situation, Sister Lea demanded in Berlin that pimps and brothel owners be granted no managerial authority. Furthermore, SOLWODI calls for female prostitution to be prohibited under 21 years of age, that compulsory health checks outside the brothels be introduced, that new police controls be created in the vicinity and that not only are personal statements of affected women obtained, but also background investigations such as bank accounts, cash flows etc. are observed, evaluated and taken into account in processes. Moreover, patrons consorting with those forced into prostitution should be prosecuted.

**Koblenz: Iris Berben reads from her book “Women move the world” - “I had wished for such a sister!”**

On 4<sup>th</sup> August, actress Iris Berben met with SOLWODI founder Sister Lea Ackermann during a reading of her book “Women move the world” for a personal conversation. There was later time for a short interview with the team about SOLWODI's work.



**How did you become aware of Sister Lea and SOLWODI?**

Through a very personal approach. I grew up in a convent and had wished for such a Sister. For my book “Women move the world” I searched for dedicated women worldwide and stumbled upon Sister Lea's unusual biography. I thought then, “Aha, this is also a possibility to live, Catholicism or the love of God or religion or whatever one wants to call it. I had left the church and only much later with a certain understanding returned. That was my personal path and I said, “Such a woman interests me.” Because that would have helped me even as a youth, this path that she found: How do you approach people, how do you talk to them and is it perhaps even a nun's habit that results in a certain distance and prejudice?

**What exactly in SOLWODI's work to you find important and worthy of support?**

The perfidy is yes: Our globalised world offers more and easier opportunities to abuse women and bring them into sexual or overall dependence. Human trafficking and sex tourism are and remain unfortunately God's subjects. Precisely because these problems increase, it is important not to give up but to stay tuned and cultivate the terrain like a piece of land. Hence I find the work of Sister Ackermann especially important.

**Do you have a wish for the future with regards to women's rights?**

Anyone who is involved in women's rights is happy about self confident operating models and at the same time we notice that there is much more work for us. It is important to find various approaches to always open up the topic. Therefore I wish for us all that women like Sister Lea are needed, accepted and appreciated for their capabilities. The interview was led by Theresa Locker

**The Court – surrender to the machinations of the perpetrators?**

*Associate Soni Unterreithmeier describes a shocking case from Augsburg*

A raid on a suspected apartment, bull's eye. Two young Romanian women give themselves up to be identified at victims, feel themselves freed, report of oppression, exploitation and force – the repeated, matching, even judicial statements, signed protocols, finally something in the hand. The two women return to their homeland.

Half a year later: The main trial before Augsburg's District Court. The three defendants unanimously declare that there never were any forms of coercion, pressure or exploitation and that the cooperation with the two young women were made on purely voluntary basis.

The subsequent hearings brought a surprise: Nadja, one of the two Romanians, appeared as a witness. She had indeed a bad conscience over the defendants. “I am no victim,” she declared in court, “I am a friend of the accused.” For the money collected she delivered work round the clock, to fulfill all sexual services, which were all done of her own free will. The statement given at the time was invented. The 18 year old is on the grounds of false testimony, discharged. She bursts into tears, no

one having discussed this possibility with her. Yet on the following night, she is visited by a lawyer -- sent and funded by the chief perpetrator's mother-- in prison.

Police questioning follows – the suspicions are doubtless: Nadja admits that the perpetrators pressured her to recant her testimony. Nadja appears relieved that the police are confident.

Yet this is followed by another visit from the dubious lawyer – Nadja signs a declaration that she would not make further statements. She appears increasingly overwhelmed, disoriented, contradictory and in the end, all parties are upset with the obvious lies.

Is that all? No, the calculation of the three accused pays off. The witness rendered herself untrustworthy

through her contradictions. And thus the perpetrators get off with a suspended sentence!

A witness is threatened, bought and influenced while the perpetrators go free. This can only be an encouragement for all others to do the same and wield power over timid and oppressed women. And this will remain the case so long as witness testimony continues to be the sole proof of human trafficking, incriminating the perpetrators through the victims. The police already knows that as long as objective physical evidence such as phone calls and cash flows are not used in cases against traffickers, the victims, who in any case are dependent, are always lost.

## To be a woman in ..... Romania

by Irina Vasilescu

In Romania, most men look upon us women best as a wife or mother, who stands in the kitchen at home and looks after the children and household. I know of what I speak: I come from Romania, am 27 years old and at the moment undergoing my postgraduate studies in Bonn. I am a radio journalist, earning my own living. Of that I am proud because Romania is till today a very patriarchal country.

With that comes a woman who stays at home and a man who is the family's breadwinner, hardly any Romanian family today can survive. Since Romania joined the EU, the possibilities but also the pressures have increased. Countless women leave their families, children and homeland to earn money abroad. In the EU, we women are more in demand. Our love and concern are valued as gold in the care of the elderly or as babysitters. The downside of this new freedom: in my homeland an estimated 350,000 children are left behind without a mother or father.

The downside of the new freedom is that more and more Romanian women fall for false promises and become victims of human trafficking. The statistics say around a fifth of all traded women to Germany are Romanian women.

Women as commodity, as a thing that men stare at, can be insulting and demeaning. This is everyday life for women in Romania. I am in Ploiesti, about 200,000 inhabitants, 60 km north of Bucharest, on the way to an interview at the police station. I wear long linen trousers, a blouse, sandals. Again and again I pass groups of men by, young, older, old. They turn around, stare at me or better, my upper body. Because I wear no bra. My blouse is neither see-through nor conspicuously low-cut. I simply wear no bra because I believe this is healthier and more comfortable. For me, this is just a personal choice and no invitation to

random men to insult me from behind. I can feel anger rising in me.

I meet police inspector Marian Popescu of the Department of Prevention of Violence at the Bureau. In a still so patriarchal society such as Romania's, domestic violence is a big, all too happily silenced topic. In half a year alone in Prahova, my home province with about 830,000 inhabitants, more than 300 cases of domestic violence is recorded. "But the statistic is actually totally irrelevant here," says Inspector Popescu. "Most victims are too scared to make a display – the unreported cases here are much higher."

So what to do? Marian Popescu has launched an education program in schools on domestic violence to life. "Domestic violence is a challenge for every individual," he says. "We try with our initiative to break the old habits and ways of thinking and to plant new, healthy images of family and living together." A good start, but he and his colleagues have much to do.

Unreported cases and dark secrets – these are available in another area, one that Romanian women all over Europe relate to, even in Germany: Prostitution. The attempt in Romania to legalize prostitution – as it is in Germany – failed conclusively with the resistance of the Orthodox Church. Perhaps rightly so as there were many other opponents. The famous feminist blogger Dorina Mihai fears that, "Legalization of prostitution would only drive the numbers of clients sky high. In the

end, Romania would be a travel destination for sex tourists, like Thailand." Even prostitutes themselves reject the legislation. Dorina adds that, "I do not want the state to be my pimp, so to speak." Dorina has been working already for almost 10 years with ARAS, the Romanian Anti-Aids Organization which advocates for the health and rights of prostitutes. Liana Velica, Project Manager at ARAS, knows the situation of women who work in prostitution and how vulnerable they are, "These women are always victims – victims of their pimps, their clients and also victims of the police."

But, and this is very important to me: In Romania, as elsewhere in the world, women are not always victims. Even in my home town there are completely normal women. Mihaela Dinescu – long time family friend, good-looking, independent, successful. Working life has not made her masculine, simply stronger. "I have been doing my job for 20 years – never have I felt myself discriminated against," says the boss of a large butcher shop and beauty salon. "On the contrary, my feminine charm is always an advantage in the business world."

And Mihaela is, for all the problems facing the women in my country, no isolated case: clever, well educated and successful women who combine work and family are unstoppable, even in Romania. This conviction encourages, hopefully, not only me.

**At SOLWODI all are helped: Thank you for the big steps...**

On 31 May we received a donation from the Catholic Women's League of Biberach to the tune of EUR 2,500. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks on behalf of the women in our care. On this point we would also like to thank all other sections of the Catholic Women's League, who have supported us financially.



The Catholic Women's League of Biberach organized in March 2012 a week of action on the theme of trafficking for sexual exploitation, showing films from Marion Pfeifer and Inge Bell, which were followed by discussions led by Marion Pfeifer. Support was also provided through the city council and as well as the police. Since the topic aroused great interest, the action week in Biberach will perhaps not be the last one on this subject.



We were very happy to receive a generous donation in the sum of EUR 5,000 from the Zonta Club of Munich. On 16 July 2012, the official check presentation was held during the Zonta Women's Club evening. The Bavarian State Minister for Labour and Social Affairs, Family and Women, Christine Haderthauer (CSU) was present. The donations were collected on 11 May 2012 at a benefit gala in the style of an evening casino, organized by the Zonta Club of Munich.

We are very excited about this windfall which we will utilize most of all for financing the lodging of vulnerable women in Munich. On this point, we would like to once again thank for the active and financial support shown by the Zonta women, whom we have gotten to know for years.

**...and thanks for many small steps!**

SOLWODI is as grateful for big individual donations as the ones above as valuable we are for our reliable regular donors. In the meantime, SOLWODI receives from over 130 people regular contributions: once a month, every 3 or 6 months or once a year. Some donors have been with us from the very beginning and have helped us for over 25 years. Whether EUR 1.50, EUR 15 or EUR 150 a month, our donors give us security and help us to better plan the coverage of our running costs. Every cent counts to SOLWODI! Thank you!

**Münz Company Run in Koblenz on 22 June 2012**

The SOLWODI Team gave its best shot at the Münz company run. All made it to the target. The best time from the SOLWODI-team was from Bodo Lauerbach who ran 5 km in 23:08 mins. But all other running times were according to expectations. We are very proud to win such a motivated team for the Münz Company Run.



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**Bank Accounts**

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 Sorting Code 590 500 00  
 BIC SALADE55XXX  
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