

SOLWODI

Solidarity with women in distress

Solidarität mit Frauen in Not

Newsletter
No. 94, December 2012



Dear friends and all other people interested in our work,

We address you for the last time this year with this current newsletter. We thank you from our hearts for your interest, support and goodwill. It has been an exhausting and uplifting year. This year, we have also been able to thank to your support effectively and concretely help many of those seeking support as well as women and children under threat.

There was a lot to celebrate this year. Thanks to the dedication of many volunteers, I celebrated my 75th birthday with several small fundraisers near our counseling centres and thus could simultaneously contribute to the financing of our 15 counseling centres and 7 shelters, which is a daily challenge. I am grateful at having been bestowed with the high honor of the Federal Cross of Merit. In addition, I was permitted to celebrate the golden jubilee of my ordination on the 15th of August.

All these events demonstrate that I am getting on in years and must therefore ensure that SOLWODI continues with much momentum. So I am happy to be able to report that we have a managing director since 1 October 2012. The head of Osnabruck's Counseling Centre, Monika Hartenfels, has taken on this task. Naturally, I remain with SOLWODI, which is dear to me, and have the honor now to be active as president.

In this newsletter we report from the frontlines of our daily work: be it in a raid, in the struggle against bureaucratic obstacles or the contradictions of German law and jurisdiction. Furthermore, we have a very thought provoking report about being a woman in Egypt.

I wish you all a peaceful Advent, a Merry Christmas and God's blessings for the New Year.

Yours, Sister Lea

Content

SOLWODI Comes to Austria Page 1

Partnering with the Police against Flat-rate Brothels Page 2

Silence brings suffering
By Soni Unterreithmeier Page 2

Being a Woman in Egypt
By Ibtisam Fawzy Page 3

Equal Opportunities for All Page 3

"Fliege-Stiftung" shows Solidarity with Women in Distress Page 4

Language Courses as the Key to Integration Page 4

SOLWODI Koblenz Association on the Verge of Being Established Page 4

Imprint Page 4

SOLWODI Comes to Austria - Six Religious Orders Establish an Association and Open Protective Housing

In 2010, a group of nuns established themselves to work against trafficking in women. Now they have teamed up with the international movement of SOLWODI and established an independent association of SOLWODI Austria, which like its German counterpart, works for women who are victims of trafficking, sexual violence and exploitation.

The house, which contains the new shelter, was handed over on 15 October 2012 to the newly formed association in a ceremony.

The Chair, Sister Patricia Erber (Salvadorian) and the future head of the shelter, Sister Anna Mayrhofer (Franciscan Missionary of Mary) obtained the key to the house at the end of the liturgical service. The scripture about the crippled woman (Luke 13, 10-17) and thoughts about the 'key' symbol gave the celebration an actual depth. All religious representatives were left very moved.

Sr. Maria Petra Schüttenkopf (Steyler missionary sister), will, like Sr. Marianne Milkde, handle the volunteer services. Sr. Susanne Krendelsberger (Caritas Socialis), the vice-chair, was unable to attend. Meanwhile, the first residents have been taken into the shelter. The project is financially supported by the Association of Austrian Nuns and private donors.



Partnering with the Police against Flat-rate Brothels – SOLWODI Accompanies a Raid

"A beer, a hot dog, a woman - 8.90 EUR all inclusive" – as advertised to customers by so-called flat-rate brothels. The idea: one price for everything. SOLWODI knows from many stories all too well what the women who are employed as prostitutes experience. The woman's dignity in this business already counts for little. And in a flat-rate brothel, it's worth absolutely nothing.

At the end of October, the police approached SOLWODI to accompany them on a raid at a regional flat-rate brothel. The cause: two runaways had reported that the women had not obtained their agreed upon wages and that a so-called "women's motto" existed, whereby through force, they would be exclusively and continuously available at one's disposal for special and unusual sexual practices.

Forty-seven police officers, two employees of SOLWODI and a few interpreters were present at the operation – the aim:

To search through the brothel and private residences of the owner and manager, as well as to conduct interrogations, hence SOLWODI's involvement to offer clarification and

victim protection. So we had the opportunity to take site pictures as well as speak with the women and girls.

Fifteen prostitutes were found on site, more than the police had expected. Each woman was looked after by two police officers who took her as witness to the police station.

Personal data of the clients present were recorded. At the station, the police staff made available for SOLWODI's employees an interview room, in which the women could speak with us privately before and after their interrogation. Five women that is a third of the prostitutes took up the offer.

It was noticeable that some prostitutes were younger than 21 years old. Most came from Eastern Europe and

indicated that they came here to support their families back home.

Although all except one of the women admitted to being unhappy and feeling broken, none had the courage to speak out about the circumstances of the brothel or acknowledge that she was in distress and needed help.

Despite this, we were grateful that we could directly introduce our organization and offer our help and emergency contact number. As we had the feeling that one woman really wanted help, we spoke with the victim's police guard, to look out strongly for this woman in the next inspection check and when appropriate inform us. We thank the police for the excellent cooperation.

SILENCE BRINGS SUFFERING - Still no Happy-End for Mother und Child

by *Soni Unterreithmeier*

We have already reported twice before in our newsletters on the case of an Iranian mother and her daughter. Ms H. was persecuted in her home country and she sought asylum and help in Germany. However, she went from one nightmare into another. A psychological crisis, common after such an experience, brought her to a hospital in Holland, where a friend lived. Her daughter was placed in the care of a Dutch family and Ms H. was deported back to Germany and even received a travel ban – no contact between mother and daughter!

All that is now well over a year ago. Ms H. has now been given custody of her daughter and permission to stay in Germany by a German court. Full of hope, she booked a ticket to Holland in late summer this year after 15 months of separation to see her daughter and to take her home.

But she had not considered the Dutch youth welfare department which had decided on the initial separation of mother and child in May 2011. The department did not release the necessary written statement. The Dutch court which should have eventually decided on the case subsequently postponed the trial for another two months. The long awaited reunion between mother and daughter lasted an hour in the youth welfare department, in the presence of the foster mother and a worker who could only converse in Dutch. A scandal.

All German institutions including the international social services are in favour of the family being reunited. Yet, only one single authority, one person, the guardian has met not the obligation to comment on the case while the little girl remains for yet another 2 months in the foster home. SOLWODI continues to fight to ensure that the situation comes to its longed for happy end.



*'In the christmas bakery
there are delicious treats,
between milk and flour,
some clown*

makes a frightful chaos' -

As in this nursery rhyme, the children in the SOLWODI shelter have fun baking cookies together. They also help with the pre-Christmas decorating of the room and window.

Apart from the excellent counselling work with the women, this is a valuable community experience, in which hope and strength lie ahead.

Being a Woman in Egypt

By Ibtisam Fawzy

All around the world, more and more women are venturing out to balance family and professional lives. Some want to pursue a professional career in order to live out their dreams and be independent. Others must work because their families need every penny. In my homeland Egypt, 35 percent of women are the sole breadwinners in their families, according to official statistics. All of these women are under immense pressure: family, children, household chores must all not be affected. On the contrary, all must be perfect. As if that weren't already enough, women in my country suffer frequently from something else in the pursuit of career and caring for families – sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is for us a daily affair: be it physical, through words or even from the offensive ogling, they are without respect. According to a survey by the Egyptian Women's Rights Centre, 83 percent of women were victims of this form of humiliation in 2008.

As someone born and bred in Cairo, I know what I speak of: already as a little girl I learned the most important rule – avoid crowds! In daily life this meant no crowded buses, no bustling shopping areas, no public rallies. Yet in January 2011 a miracle happened on Tahrir Square which I experienced firsthand: women standing in the front rows with men, calling for the resignation of the authoritarian president who had ruled the country for 30 years.

In the initial days of the demonstrations I made my way out of curiosity to the square which was near my work place. I am a journalist. The stories of the people blazed, their voices were full of hope, their eyes filled with pride and determination. After a few minutes I already knew that I would not have to fear harassment here.

And indeed there were no known cases of sexual harassment during the

demonstrations. We were equal as never before, finally. There, the women called not just for change but also cared for the wounded, organized access to the square and participated in activities and campaigns. Finally we reached our goal – a historic moment. I met many mothers with their daughters, who had painted their faces the colors of the national flag. 'I have brought my 4 year old daughter along,' said one mother, 'History will be written here!'

However, our wonder did not last long. In the following months, women endured many brutal assaults during the political change. For example, Samira Ibrahim one graceful 25 year old woman from the south of the country. She wears a long skirt, blouse, pullover, a headscarf – a modern Egyptian woman. She stood exactly on Tahrir Square and did what she already longed dreamed of: to fight for a country where the people could decide for themselves. However, three months later, while participating in a political protest, she was to learn painfully, that the old 'Order' was not so lightly beaten. The army imprisoned her in a military jail. 'A woman led me to a room,' explained Samira. 'I thought it would be

a normal interrogation and she requested the doors and window of the room to be closed. A group of soldiers stood before the door and looked at me. The woman gave up. Later she ordered me to undress and lie on the bed so that a doctor could examine me. He wanted to determine if I was still a virgin. At that moment, I wanted to die. Such humiliation was unimaginable for me.'

Samira is certain that it was a well planned action executed with the aim to deter women from protesting. 'The will of the women should be broken,' she said. An act of humiliation, which she and all others alike should be brow beaten into. She has however decided to fight. She went before a military court and lost the process but not her courage. This is galvanized all of us: again and again courageous women emerge, speaking about the humiliations of everyday life which were for so long a taboo. Now, we Egyptian women continue working to obtain the esteem which is our dignity. We have shaped the Arab Spring, now we want also to see the summer!

Equal Opportunities for All

Since May 2011, SOLWODI has been looking after a minor from Africa. We call her Emmy. She has found a secure home in one of SOLWODI's shelter, at least temporarily. Emmy successfully applied for unemployment benefits and graduated from a language school in July 2012. Motivated and determined, she wanted to be responsible for herself and planned to attend a career entry school in September.

A career entry school falls under the German Federal Education Assistance Act. For Emmy this means no more unemployment benefits, but rather federal financial aid. And therein lies the problem: To get this federal assistance, Emmy would need to have lived in Germany least four years with her residence permit (according to § 25 of the Residence Abs.III). She does not. Emmy was given the right to reside here only one and a half years ago so she does not qualify for grants for higher education but it is also no more on unemployment benefits.

But it has been a blessing in disguise - Emmy has a committed guardian who fought successfully for Emmy with the job center and all other authorities. Emmy has been recognized as a hardship case. Even if she does not obtain the federal education assistance, she will receive unemployed allowance as an interest free loan.

“Fliege-Stiftung” shows Solidarity with Women in Distress

SOLWODI received an award of EUR 10,000 from “Fliege-Stiftung” through the evangelical Johanneskirchengemeinde Berlin-Lichterfelde, with whom SOLWODI's Counseling Centre in Berlin has had a very good cooperation since its founding. The “Fliege-Stiftung” is an initiative of Jürgen Fliege, pastor, TV-Moderator and author. We will directly support women in distress with this money. Sr. Margit Forster, head of the Berlin Counseling Centre, will receive on 3. December the award in the Tutzing Evangelical Academy. Many heartfelt thanks, also on behalf of our women. .

Language Courses as the Key to Integration

Where would we be without our volunteers, their fabulous ideas and good networks! Ulrike Gottlob is not only a volunteer for SOLWODI Berlin, but also a member of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, an international organization with more than 100,000 members in 18 countries, supporting the intercultural professional and personal development and training of women. Ulrike Gottlob saw the potential and applied for financial funding for language courses for the women supported by SOLWODI Berlin. She must be convincing: the Delta Kappa Gamma Society Educational Foundation finances now 10 language courses, including childcare, books and transport fees, for which \$7,500 has been set aside.

A Special Christmas Present: SOLWODI Koblenz Association on the Verge of Being Established

Yet an example of the priceless role played by SOLWODI volunteers: Out of the initiative of Monika Hömberger, Dr. Ingeborg Thümmel, Rita Hieble and Ann-Katrin Metka, women in Koblenz met at the beginning of November to prepare for the founding of SOLWODI Association. The primary goal of the association, in addition to the general support of SOLWODI Rhineland-Palatinate, will be to help the Koblenz shelter.

"Establishing a support association for SOLWODI Rhineland-Palatinate and the SOLWODI shelter Koblenz is for me a matter of the heart and also urgently needed," said Sister Lea Ackermann, grateful for the initiative of the Koblenz women. "I love it when people find us, are inspired by us to be creative and help us."

With the support from Beatrix Hecken-Knieling, a lawyer, the women honed the statute and discussed the organization of the association. A founding assembly can now be held to elect the board of the association. Everyone is sincerely invited to this – the date will be indicated in due course on SOLWODI's website.

'Everyone can be involved in the association and help women and children,' said Dr. Ingeborg Thümmel. Whether through sporting activities, donations for children's toys, translation help or publicity, there are many possibilities to be involved, and not only for women but also men are welcomed sincerely to join us.

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