

SOLWODI

Solidarity with
women in distress

Solidarität mit
Frauen in Not

Newsletter

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Dear friends and all other people interested in our work,

2013 has begun – what will be important in this year for us women? The modern woman googles and is shocked by the results generated: 'Single Latvian Ladies' appears first and foremost as a classified advert, Erotic Contact, Sex Counsellor, 'Top Singles for you' or 'All for Women – all about Beauty, Love and Sex' – these are the top results that Google offers from the search of the word 'Women' in German.

Are these the suggestions from the modern medium of the Internet that I would wish for today's women? My answer: a decisive No! Yet from SOLWODI's view I must unfortunately say that the results reflect again what is for far too many women here in the middle of Germany a reality – women, who are interested only in having sex, love and beauty, women as commodity, as objects of desire, that can be commercially transacted for a fee. SOLWODI meets on a daily basis, women who have lived through and had their own bodies suffer this experience. (see page 3) We tell in this newsletter about our encounters with the women. How do we help women out of adversity? How do we enable them to find a way out of prostitution? (see page 2)

In our next newsletter, we introduce how we facilitate migrants to return to their home countries, how we educate society and politicians on the theme of forced prostitution and human trafficking and how we advocate internationally for women in adversity. Detailed information can be found on our Homepage now in English, French and Spanish – www.solwodi.de

Women's rights, women in politics, women in the boardroom, women and freedom, saintly women, courageous women – these are the Google results that I wish for. SOLWODI in 2013 will work towards that with understanding, heart and passion so that these themes become most connected with 'Women'.

I wish you all a good 2013 ahead.

Yours, Sister Lea

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Interview with Monika Hartenfels – SOLWODI's new Executive Director introduces herself

In Osnabrück, she led both the local SOLWODI information centre and the shelter housing of the National Association of Lower Saxony. Monika Hartenfels is now the Executive Director of SOLWODI Germany.

You have followed the work of Sister Lead long before you came to SOLWODI – why were you so interested in SOLWODI?

It was exactly SOLWODI's work that interested and influenced me because I have always been engaged in issues of equality between men and women, be it in the private sphere, so for friends as well as the family unit, in the education of my two sons and my daughter, or in the professional sphere. As a result, I inevitably encountered SOLWODI as it, together with Sister Dr. Lea Ackerman advocates for equality and women's rights. And specifically for women who otherwise would not be perceived within these issues.

Are there focus areas that you would like to establish for your future work for SOLWODI?

Yes, assured funding for SOLWODI is in any case a part of it. We receive varied levels of state grants from the five federal states in which SOLWODI is represented. That alone is not enough. In order to continue in the future to adequately perform our work, we urgently need higher financial contributions, even from federal funds.

No less important is the area of public relations such as lobbying for women's rights. It means sensitising the public and even convincing the politicians that they need to work on strengthening women's rights.



*Sr. Lea Ackermann and
Monika Hartenfels*

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A further focus area: the internal communications. Only when personnel are contented can they mobilise all their capacity to serve their clients. Worker satisfaction serves the well being of the clients.

How would the practical cooperation with Sister Lea in the future look?

We have a division of labour in our collaboration: Sister Lea remains as SOLWODI's President. As the first Chairperson she is further responsible for the large Africa region. Moreover, her public relations work and communications with politicians, media and experts are indispensable. And as Executive Director, I am as the name says, responsible for directing the operations of the organisation. Naturally, we continue to exchange, support and complement each other in our work, most of all when it comes to national public relations and media dealings.

What is for you personally the most important goal for 2013?

Before I took on the challenge of leading SOLWODI, I had a special resolution to remain calm. Only then can I devote a hundred percent of my energy to the work. And I intend to do so, with SOLWODI, with my body, soul and understanding, for women in distress. (The complete interview can be found on our homepage.)

Border less operation for women in distress – What does SOLWODI's work look like?

An example from Streetwork

Our colleagues take the opportunity regularly once a week to visit the brothels or walk along the streets. In this way, they encounter first-hand the harassment that women are exposed to daily. Our goal is to seek out migrants in prostitution, help them with any problems on the side and, when they would like to, help with an exit from prostitution.

We keep a watchful eye out for victims of human trafficking and forced prostitution in the course of our work. Our personnel are so linguistically good that we are able to reach out to many women in their mother tongues. Most of them come from Eastern Europe, especially Romania. We advise the women on site about health issues and also violence and exploitation. We clarify with them about their rights, health insurance or risk infections and arrange psychosocial coun-

selling. We also help further with residency queries. Our offers to accompany them to the doctors are gladly taken up. Women also turn to us when they feel threatened by clients or pimps. We also offer them lodging in one of our shelters. Most of all, we support the women in leaving this environment. Together we plan with them a future life. We help them for instance with finding an apartment. Some of them are illiterate, others have never learned a skill.

In these cases, we arrange and finance German courses or training, with which they can stand on their own feet and live a straight 'civilian' life.

Additionally, SOLWODI provides much more - through the help for women in Kenya, PR and advocacy or help in returning home for migrants. You will learn more about this in our next newsletter.



Are we morally blind?

The 2002 Prostitution Act has apparently made prostitution so socially acceptable that young people publicly take aim at these women and their daily activities in the form of coarse jokes. That happened at an afternoon 2013 Carnival parade near Augsburg. We do not mean here to condemn specifically 'these young people', but instead the constantly observed tendency, perceptions, apparel, graphic depictions and images of the red light district entrenched in everyday life or marketed in advertising. The Carnival wagon of young people should be understood as 'fun' – so was the information in response to an inquiry – the advertisement on the back of the wagon read 'The Ritze' (slang for cleavage, vagina or bum cleavage, and name of a brothel in Hamburg) and under that, above the entire width of the wagon, were stretched wide open legs, in red high heels with an anatomically correct, red coloured centre. How do the people and especially the girls of the youth group feel, in the face of vulgar sayings and pictures on the wagon such as 'Coffee trip to the Brothel'? Did they need to fear being frowned upon as spoilsports or uptight moralists by protesting?

And here lies the actual problem! We are unfortunately used to women being associated less with top executive positions than with feminine sexual sexual harassment and stimulations (advertising, prostitution). Obscene pictures and language are actually no fun, but an attack on the dignity of women.



The bottom line: eleven years of legalised prostitution in Germany

by Debora Höly

Karin W. is a mother and grandmother like thousands others. What differentiates her from other grandmothers is that she earns her money through sex. At 33, she began to work in a brothel out of a financial desperation. She stayed 13 years there and was even a proud proprietress. Yet at some point the business stopped, 'and then I landed here,' she explains. 'Here' is the Kurfürstenstraße in Berlin, a known drug-related prostitution scene. And at 56 years old, she is still here today.



On 1 January 2002, the Red-Green Prostitution Act came into force. Germany is at this point one of the most liberal countries in the world. However, what has the Prostitution Act really brought to the average German prostitute like Karin?

The Red-Green Act should above all improve the legal and social situation for those who willingly enter prostitution. Prostitution should no longer be conducted secretly and in hiding but openly and regulated. The politicians hoped in this way, to eliminate criminal acts such as human trafficking and forced prostitution.

Yet, a 2007 study by the Federal Government shows that the law did not have the desired results – and that already 5 years after its passage. In spite of this, the Federal Government expressed emphatically that the law would not be repealed.

Karin was, as brothel-proprietress, at that time registered as self-employed. Yet she complains about

the many taxes that instead in the end induced her to go back onto the streets.

Like most of the prostitutes, she is now neither self-employed nor in possession of a work contract. The 2007 study showed that not even 10 percent of the surveyed prostitutes held a work contract and only 1 percent was explicitly employed as a prostitute.

Like Karin, around half of the prostitutes did not participate in a pension or retirement plan. They also had no savings. They will probably rely on state support in their old age.

'The Prostitution Act brought me nothing,' says Karin.

In a further study financed by the European Commission, the authors verified that liberal prostitution laws resulted in more human trafficking. The 2011 published study showed that liberal prostitution policies lead to increased demand and thus expands the market. For human traffickers and pimps, Ger-

many is as a result of the legislation, extremely attractive.

The idea behind legalising the trade, lies on the assumption that a significant proportion of prostitutes adopt this activity willingly. The proportion of women who really voluntarily take up prostitution should be negligible. The 56 year old Karin in any case knows clearly: she would not have chosen this trade.

With the law on prostitution, the German government has introduced a setting for normality, marked by violence and exploitation. Even when the Government stresses that prostitution is in no way actively supported, it does so indirectly but very effectively. The German brothel owners and pimps earn billions in double digits yearly. They are the ones to primarily profit from the liberalised rules, although that was not intended to be. Yet, unfortunately, the politicians undertake no responsibility for the consequences.

This commitment earned a medal – SOLWODI's Soni Unterreithmeier is honoured with the Augsburg Medal of Merit

Soni Unterreithmeier, the head of SOLWODI's counselling centre in Augsburg, has devoted herself with great empathy to foreign women in distress over the last 10 years. Her high personal involvement was on 18 December 2012 honoured by the Criminal Investigation Department in Augsburg with the Augsburg Medal of Merit. 'Whether with night operations or on the weekends, she managed her care functions with great personal engagement,' pointed out Helmut Sporer from the Criminal Investigation Department. 'I do not differ from the other colleagues,' remarked Soni Unterreithmeier modestly. In these 10 years, she has cared for a huge number of forced prostitutes and helped them out of hopeless situations. She psychologically stabilises the women and gives them support for a new life. Thanks to her help, many women escaped the red light scene and could lead a civilian life. She fights for better rights and social standing for women in prostitution and trafficking victims through publications, publicised projects and expertly delivered lectures.



SOLWODI is dynamically supported by Lotto Rhineland-Palatinate. Director Hans-Peter Schössler explains their reasons.

When did the good contact between SOLWODI and Lotto Rhineland-Palatinate come about?

My first encounter with Sister Lea and hence with SOLWODI happened in 2006. That is, the year of the Summer Fairy Tale that we experienced through the World Cup in our country. I associate my getting to know what is an extraordinary woman with the fascination that this world event held.

What exactly do you find about SOLWODI's work special and worthy of endorsement?

It is all special and even more is worthy of endorsement. SOLWODI and Sister Lea fight against injustice, against chicanery, against lawbreakers who commit offences against women and girls. When that is not noble and important to be supported, then I know not what else is deserving. Naturally, it is above all the Chairperson, who appears contagious in her combative and hardly conquerable way. And that over decades, not slacking, not resigning, although she knows that she cannot get rid of the problems in this area. Not all, but even yet some or much of it. That must suffice for the moment. And she rebelliously wants to reach the public to address this injustice, these social and societal taboos which happen here every day. Lea Ackermann, the lioness and her SOLWODI make the world a little bit better.

What do you wish for SOLWODI for the future?

That SOLWODI finds even more supporters, more who get involved and clearly also with money as that is needed. That Sister Lea stays for much longer around. She cannot stop and yet she must be smart to ponder over a successor. That SOLWODI finds even more public acknowledgement and notice. All that I wish from the heart.

Together we are strong – now also in Austria

With great joy we announce the establishment of the first SOLWODI association in Austria. In Vienna, the nuns decided to engage themselves for women in distress. No effort was spared in setting up the counselling centre and shelter. On 15 March, the association 'SOLWODI Austria – Solidarity with Women in Distress' was officially opened with Sister Lea Ackermann. 'With SOLWODI Austria, Germany, Romania, Rwanda and Kenya, we are truly international,' rejoiced Sister Lea.

Do you wish to support a specific project of SOLWODI's? Or a certain counselling centre? Or SOLWODI in the country in which you live? Then write simply the name of the city or country in the line of purpose. We and our women and girls are grateful for your support!

We are changing our accounting system. Thus, it could take a while before we are able to send the donation receipt confirmation. We request your understanding. Many thanks.

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