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SOLWODI

Solidarity with
women in distress

Solidarität mit
Frauen in Not

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Dear friends and all other people interested in our work,
Pope Francis has called 2015 the “Year of the Consecrated Life” – a beautiful theme. In 1960, I joined the order of the Missionary Sisters of our Lady from Africa. I was young and hungry for challenges in the bigger world. And the life of the order enabled me to have exactly that. “God has no other eyes, hands and hearts other than ours!” This sentence was my calling. We Christians are called here and now to build the kingdom of God, a dignified life in justice and freedom for all. For that, I would like to encourage you to discover and go on your own personal path.

My path is tightly bounded with SOLWODI – the work of my order led me to Kenya, where I founded SOLWODI in 1985. This year we celebrate our 30 years jubilee! We have encountered much encouragement for our work both in hindsight and when looking ahead. This is good because we have much to do this year. The so-called Prostitute Protection Act is decided upon and the winners are not the women, but those profiting from prostitution. Important requests were not considered: no compulsory detailed check-ups with doctors, which would have allowed the women in forced prostitution to find a protected room in which to confide. There is no minimum age of 21 years. Instead, younger women receive a questionable counselling offer. Compulsory condom use – which is uncontrollable and brings instead one thing: more money for unprotected intercourse. And, compulsory registration which does nothing for women who are moved month after month to yet another brothel.

More important is that we do not give up in 2015 on our calls for a ban on prostitution (see page 1 below). Prostitution is a profession like no other and never will be. This is shown by the close relation between trauma and prostitution, which the politicians and society always knew about (see page 3).

I have just returned from a long trip. I was in Kenya where I founded SOLWODI thirty years ago. Today, SOLWODI works in many places. I will report in our next newsletter on our projects in Kenya, which have been possible only because of your support.

Sister Lea Ackermann

Integration Prize for SOLWODI Berlin

The SOLWODI Counselling Centre Berlin was awarded the Epiphany prize of the Diocesan Council at the annual reception of the Archdiocese of Berlin on 16 January 2015. This integration prize is awarded annually to individuals or groups who promote the coexistence of people of different cultures, languages and religions.

Photo: © Walter Wetzler



Action Day against Violence towards Women

In 2015, the 25th of each month are nationwide days of action under the slogan "No Purchased Sex in Germany," an initiative inspired by SOLWODI and Abolition 2014. The days of action are aimed mainly as a reflection of the social and ideological expanse pursuing a ban on purchased sex in Germany. Any organization or individual initiative that supports this requirement may be involved in the action days. First, we want to visibly highlight the violence that women and children in prostitution experience. At the same time, we advocate a prohibition on the sale of sex as demanded by the European Parliament. On 25 January, the day of action was heralded with a themed service in the City Church of Koblenz. Sr. Lea Ackermann spoke there about our concerns. Those interested can read more under www.kein-sexkauf.de.

Content

Integration Prize for SOLWODI Berlin	Page 1
Action Day against Violence towards Women	Page 1
SOLWODI – Regionally active, nationally networked, nationwide engaged	Page 2
When the dream of a better life turns into a nightmare	Page 3
Humans are being dehumanized <i>Interview with Lutz-Ulrich Besser</i>	Page 3
Two book recommendations	Page 4
Imprint	Page 4

SOLWODI is regionally active through the counseling centres, women's homes and shelters. SOLWODI Associations are networked across the country and through political and practical work, not only nationally, but also Europe wide engaged. Read for yourself!

Regionally active ... in Fulda: Opening celebration of SOLWODI Counselling Centre

The official opening ceremony of the new SOLWODI Counselling Centre in Fulda took place on 23 January. As a result, SOLWODI is now represented in Hessen. At the opening ceremony, the First District Counsellors of Fulda, Vogelsberg and Hersfeld-Rotenburg and the mayor of the city of Fulda were present. Seyedeh Seddigheh Fatemi read from the SOLWODI book "To live in freedom, which has long been a dream." Ms. Kerstin Krüger was introduced as the new head of the Labour Advisory Board in Fulda and she invited those present to take a tour of the consulting room. The counselling centre in Fulda focuses on the themes of honour and violence and forced marriage, but is also open to people affected by violence from immigrant backgrounds available.



Mr. Dr. Wingenfeld, Ms. Künholz, Mr. Zielinski, Mr. Wehner, Sr. Lea Ackermann, Kerstin Krüger

... in Berlin: SOLWODI Berlin established

On January 21, 2015, the inaugural meeting of the Association SOLWODI Berlin took place. Being in Berlin, where SOLWODI's counselling centre mainly focused on accompanying African women, the association is now also a state association. Strengthened by the potential and commitment of the founding members, the association is well connected to continue the commitment to women in need with purpose.



Networked nationwide ... in Munich: Youth against Human Trafficking

On 24 January, a seminar by Free Them Germany in cooperation with SOLWODI Munich took place in Munich. The aim was to raise awareness, particularly amongst the young generation on the topic "Human trafficking and sexual exploitation." The event was attended by about 60 people. Guests included Soni Unterreithmeier (Head of SOLWODI Augsburg), Uwe Dörnhöfer (Detective Chief Superintendent from Munich), Klaus Wölflé (director), Maria Ahlin (Head of Free Them Sweden) and Kerstin Neuhaus, who had written a poem especially for the event. The four-hour seminar was moderated by Carina Jirmann (Head of Free Them Germany). The experts also reported from their own personal experiences and were available to the young audience at the end for questions and discussions.

... in Munich: Congress "End the purchase of sex"

The first international congress on the abolition of prostitution took place from 5 to 7 December 2014 in Munich. It was the first event in Germany where a legal prohibition on the sale of sex was openly discussed and information shared with the public. Alongside international and German experts were representatives from former prostitutes who shared their experiences. The speeches and discussions made clear that prostitution is an act of violence against women and hence incompatible with Articles 1 and 3 of the German Constitution. SOLWODI, which had an information booth, also contributed to a speech at the congress and was, represented in the discussion forums by many employees.

Nation and Europe wide engaged ... in Paris: SOLWODI is a founding member at CAP International

In November 2014, the first international congress of CAP took place in Paris. The Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution (CAP International) is an international organisation based in France, of which SOLWODI a founding member is. The international board was elected at the November congress and Sister Lea Ackermann was made Vice-President of CAP International. The alliance aims to achieve the elimination of prostitution primarily in Europe but also internationally. Prostitution is an act of violence against women and a hurdle on the path towards equal justice.

... in Aachen: SOLWODI contributes to a study

There are hardly any reliable figures, facts or studies in the field of human trafficking and prostitution. Hence, it is all the more pleasing for us that SOLWODI has been part of a research study on the subject since November 2014. The joint project, which will run until October 2016, is titled "Prevention and intervention in human trafficking for sexual exploitation: Technology development from a multi-disciplinary and inter-institutional perspective" (PRIMSA). The German-Austrian project is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVIT). PRIMSA focuses on Germany and Austria as transit and destination countries in trafficking for sexual exploitation. The study should, inter alia, develop conceptual and technical measures to support investigative work. In addition, concepts for enhanced support to victims as well as new training and continuing education for police officers, social workers and psychologists are created. The police and NGOs, such as SOLWODI, cooperate as associated partners.

When the dream of a better life turns into a nightmare

Trauma of women in prostitution – a hidden but very common condition

Rosen Hicher, a Frenchwoman, was in her early thirties when she lost her job and did not know, from one day to the next, how she would raise her six children. Prostitution seemed to her, at that time, an acceptable alternative. She remembers till today what one of the women, given her seemingly natural handling of prostitution, said on her first day: "Then you have already done this your whole life!" It was a long time before she fully understood the full meaning of this sentence. Today, Rosen Hicher is aware that she was abused as a child by an uncle and that she suffered for years under the tyranny of an alcoholic and violent father.

Many studies prove that these experiences are not individual cases: between 65 and 95 percent of women in prostitution experienced sexual violence as girls.

"It has been established during trauma therapies that there was a need from victims to control the traumatising events that they as children were helpless to respond to. In prostitution for example, that traumatic event is

re-enacted as a scene in which the prostitute feels she has control," says the trauma therapist Dr Ingeborg Kraus, who is committed to the "Karlsruhe Appeal" for a ban on the sale of sex in Germany. Kraus reports from her long years of experience, that all women in prostitution go along with what they had "learned" as a child: to perceive violence is normal.

Trauma and prostitution – this is a central but hardly accepted interrelation in Germany. A trauma, which means nothing else other than injury, is a personal, catastrophic event that one must overcome alone. It makes the victims feel existentially threatened and extremely helpless and defenceless. At the same time, the trauma leads often to fatalistic reaction: the victim adopts the negative opinion of the perpetrators, regards herself as useless and often becomes psychologically dependent on the tormentors and pimps. The result is that the victim-offender relationship is usually stable for years.

It is also why leaving prostitution is so difficult for many women and often succeeds only with professional help. This often requires years of work, also in treating the consequences of trauma such as panic and anxiety attacks, self-injurious behaviour, depression and mental disorders that make a normal life impossible.

In Germany, prostitution is for politicians and society a job like any other. But what kind of job perpetuates humiliation and exploitative behaviours so that those no longer able to practice their trade are regarded as "survivors?"

Rosen Hicher is one of them. She is firmly committed today to a ban on the sale of sex. She recommends that all women in prostitution take a moment to examine and question how they got there. "I tell the women that they should ask themselves why they entered prostitution. They would then clearly see that they do it because they learned the trade early on."

More information on the topic can be found at <http://www.trauma-and-prostitution.eu/>

Humans are being dehumanized

An interview with Lutz-Ulrich Besser - founder and leader of the Centre for Psycho-Trauma and Trauma-Therapy in Lower-Saxony.

SOLWODI: Is prostitution a job like any other?

Lutz-Ulrich Besser: This is nothing like any other job. Anyone who engages in it should be clear that this very intimate process of penetrating into the body of a woman - even if it is a supposedly mutual agreement – is only bearable, if the woman separates her feelings from her consciousness. Women in prostitution are usually in cases of hardship and hence are coerced by their pimps. This has to do with exploitation and sexual humiliation - and is an attack on the dignity of women.

SOLWODI: How do past experiences in childhood lead to prostitution?

Lutz-Ulrich Besser: Women who were subjected as children to so-called sexual abuse had no way at all to accurately perceive what happened to them. The fear, disgust, maybe the pain can only be overcome by a strong dissociative process of elimination. However, this experience is equally frozen in the brain. The main mechanism here is a standing beside oneself, as if "it's not me anymore". As a result, the feelings and body sensations are separated from consciousness; Prostitution is, for many women who have already been sexually exploited in their childhood, a repetition or continuation of humiliation and exploitation of their own bodies.

SOLWODI: Could these women ever be healed?

Lutz-Ulrich Besser: Such phenomena can naturally be treated today already. So long as women are not in economic hardship or under the control of violent pimps, then the crucial question is whether the woman perceives within her that all these things are not good and that she has to get out there.



SOLWODI: What should be done to reduce trauma in prostitution?

Lutz-Ulrich Besser: It requires, above all, awareness. One has to turn to men and to create awareness that they are abusing women by participating in prostitution. The men think: I buy myself a woman's body, so I have the right to use her. The ability to buy women is the real problem behind it. The men do not realise it at the moment because they pay money over the counter like for a commodity. But this is always, yes, I would say a lousy business.

SOLWODI: How do you assess the situation, especially in Germany?

Lutz-Ulrich Besser: The red-green Prostitution Law of 2002 was certainly well-intentioned, but the effect is that Germany's actually become the brothel of Europe. The legitimacy has meant that large brothels exist as supermarkets. When you look at talk shows in which brothel owners communicate as a matter of course that they provide a beautiful setting for the love maids and their clients in exchange for money, then it shows the actual difficulties. This is about exploitation of femininity and women.

SOLWODI: How would you imagine awareness to look like?

Lutz-Ulrich Besser: Aside from the fact that prostitution is the world's oldest trade, there has been an increase in sexually problematic behaviour. This is especially contributed to by ubiquitous pornography. Two clicks and even children and young people are on the relevant porn sites on the Internet, and I'm not talking about what is illegal! What does this mean for the development of children and adolescents and their ideas of what constitutes sexuality, which I find a very, very, very dangerous development. The more one stokes fantasies, the more they become reality. I would introduce much stronger prohibitions, especially in the area of pornography and not just punish child pornography. But the state and the porn industry earns. The sex industry is a highly cost-effective industrial branch, so I fear that the politicians do not really have an interest to intervene. Human sexuality is primarily a pleasurable social interaction between two equal adult human at all impulsiveness. However, prostitution is highly antisocial.

Two book recommendations from SOLWODI



Michael Rutz (Hg.): Justice is possible. Herder Verlag 2015. With a contribution from Sr. Lea Ackermann.

Justice is more than an utopia. Experts from politics, media, business, law and social sciences, and social movements all give these encouraging assessments. On the basis of diverse, current issues, they show that justice is possible. This anthology does not remain only in grey theory. It provides is above all practical measures at hand. How to manage justice - as a politician, as an entrepreneur, as an individual? How justice can be pursued as an objective world? An exciting book that stimulates thinking and acting.



Dear Unusual Life - Life Testimonies of Ordinary Religious Men and Women. Benno Verlag 2014. With a contribution from Sr. Lea Ackermann.

2015 has been declared as the year of the Order of the Vatican. By February 2016, the diversity of religious life should be highlighted, a good reason to recommend this book about unusual religious biographies. The surprising ways of life that are told here show one thing above all: God's ways are often intertwined. For example, a sailor who becomes a Franciscan monk after a special event or a nun on a marathon in which she comes close to God. Conclusion: An entertaining reading about interesting people who found their purpose in life as followers of Jesus.

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