

SOLWODI

Solidarity with
women in distress

Solidarität mit
Frauen in Not

Newsletter
No. 89, September 2011

Dear friends and interested readers,

We are back with our newsletter and hope that you had a nice time during the summer. As always, SOLWODI stays up close to the subject of trafficking in women, as you will read in this issue. We experience that the discussion about prostitution and sexuality is raising less interest and concern nowadays. The question is what kind of society we want to live in. We at SOLWODI are happy that we manage to help women in seemingly hopeless situations and to see our work bearing fruit. By presenting our positions on various events, we want to set other courses to improve the social cooperation. This is why we are very happy about the big circle of subscribers to our newsletter and your interest in our work. We would like to thank you for your financial and voluntary support. With your help we will be able to continue our work for women in need. We wish you all the best!



Yours, Sister Lea

Good cooperation with the law enforcement authorities in Koblenz

For many years, SOLWODI has been cooperating very well with the law enforcement authorities in Koblenz. The interdisciplinary cooperation has been built up over the years and is constantly enhanced. The cooperation includes training and regular expert conferences, concerning for example the witness protection. Unfortunately this good networking seems to be at risk now. There are ideas about merging the higher regional court and the office of the chief public prosecutor in Koblenz with the respective institutions in Zweibrücken. Although Koblenz is the bigger city, plans are to move all authorities to Zweibrücken. Nowadays, institutions are merged more and more often. The results are growing work units and more de-personalization. After a fusion, the distances are longer, there are less people employed and there is more work for them to do. Cost reduction is often mentioned as a reason for merging, but it often shows to be unrealizable. As our cooperation with the local authorities would be affected by a dislocation to Zweibrücken, we sent a letter to the ministry of justice and consumer protection of the Rhineland-Palatinate, stating our counter-arguments. You can find these on our website by following the link „Politische Stellungnahme“ (political statement). It is very important for us to keep up our good network with the law enforcement authorities in Koblenz. After all it is us who contribute to constitutional democracy with our work as well.

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- Ein starker Partner im Land -

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

Taking human rights seriously

“Taking human rights seriously – theory and practice using the example of water and education”. This is the title of our discussion meeting that took place in the conference hall of the city council of Koblenz on the International Day of Peace, September 21st, 2011. The event was welcomed by the UNESCO as part of their activities on „Education for sustainable development“. The United Nations decade of the same title began in 2005 and will end in 2014. Its goal is to demonstrate how actions that are taken today affect the following generations in all world religions. You will find a report of this event on our website by the end of September.

A newspaper article and the aftermath

“Lilja”, the street work project of SOLWODI in Oberhausen has led to a debate about prostitution and how to deal with it. In July our colleagues presented the project “Lilja” to the persons responsible for the local social policy. The newspaper “Der Westen” (WAZ) wrote a detailed and very straightforward article about the working day and how experience shows that forced prostitution is not the exception.

The newspaper reported thereafter, that the politicians made very distinct comments. Regina Boos from the Free Democrats for example believes that it is poverty that often forces women to work as prostitutes and Ulrike Willing-Spielmann from the Christian Democrats demands to raise the minimum age for prostitution from 18 to 21. Angelika Jäntsch from the Social Democrats is pleading for more human dignity in this "job". A brothel owner also spoke up. He thinks that "Lilja" told a one-sided story about the prostitutes in his brothel. He says that the prostitutes working for him know the facts of life and are independent women between the age of 25 and 66. Some, he says, are only prosti-

tuting themselves to earn money for long-distance journeys. He also criticises the brutalization caused by the clients demanding more and more extreme sexual practises and demands new laws that forbid sex without condoms and demand regular health checks.

Some of the concerned prostitutes followed the discussions and gave the following feedback to our colleagues in Oberhausen: It is good that SOLWODI told the truth about our situation and conditions. The pimps are the ones who are in authority. For example, the woman working next door was in hospital for two days and took up her work as a prostitute again right after her return. Which woman would do that

out of her free will? Other women were angry about our report on prostitution. They said that they are working as prostitutes independently and they believe that women working for a pimp are stupid and the only ones responsible for their own problems. But despite these opposing comments, the project "Lilja" had a lot of women asking SOLWODI for help in the past weeks. And the number of women who wish to quit prostitution is still very high.

If you have an opinion concerning this matter, we would be very interested in it. Please send your comments to info@solwodi.de.

„I would do anything to enable my children to go to school!“

Report by SOLWODI employee Oanh Tran about a motivated returnee

„I used to be a construction worker” she said. I responded: „Well, then you must have many muscles!” She laughed. When I went to Berlin to meet her in custody pending deportation, she seemed robust, though anything but strong. I could see that she had suffered a lot.

She began to talk. She did not earn much as a construction worker in Vietnam. Her husband had been fighting a renal disease for many years. When he died, she was left alone with her four children. In the north of Vietnam, where she comes from, they are still living by the old structures. Every family only gets a small piece of land where they can culture rice to feed themselves. It is not possible to buy new land or to sell the old. When the harvest was good, it was enough to keep them from starving. But the family was not able to buy anything and education for the children seemed to be impossible. This is why she took her youngest daughter to her sister, gave the responsibility for the other children to her oldest son and left Vietnam for Germany in 2008.

People who read this will ask themselves, why she did not invest the money she needed for the trip to Germany into setting up a business at home. I found out the reason for this on my last visit to Vietnam in June 2011 when I talked to some of



the returnees and to some of my friends and relatives. It is very difficult to get a credit for a business by the banks in Vietnam. But if you say that you want to use the money to travel abroad and find work there, they will give you a credit very easily. This is because to most people the chances to earn good money seem to be better abroad than in Vietnam. As most people who were brought

to Germany by traffickers, she went to a home for asylum-seekers. But her application for asylum was rejected and she went into hiding. She worked illegally to pay the debts she had made to come to Germany. This went well for a while but then suddenly there was no more work and she had to find another solution. For 4,000 Euros, traffickers brought her to England where she started working illegally again. She began to pay back her debts to the traffickers and when she had just finished paying them off she was caught by the police and sent back to Germany. This was where I met Ngoc* in April of 2011. She was in custody in Berlin waiting to be sent back to Vietnam. One of our colleagues at SOLWODI visits the women in custody pending deporta-

tion once a week. She talks to them, encourages them and informs them about their possibilities. When there are problems communicating with Vietnamese women, I often get called to translate. When I met Ngoc, she was free of debts, but she had no money to start over in Vietnam either. With the help of our returnee project she will be able to build a small kiosk on her piece of

land to feed her family and herself. In June of 2011 I visited her in her Village in Vietnam and talked to her about her plans for the future. Shortly after she had come back to Vietnam, she went to her sister to see her youngest daughter. It is her biggest wish to take her child home with her as soon as her situation is stabilized. When I asked her if she would consider going back to Ger-

many again, she said: “No! If SOLWODI supports me, I will not go away again. I will be able to build up my own business with their help. This way I can be sure that my children can go to school and learn. I would do anything to send my kids to school!”

**name changed*



SOLWODI in a sea of flowers

Our campaign day at the Federal Garden Show in Koblenz on July 17, 2011 was very varied and attracted a lot of visitors. The seats in front of the Rhineland-Palatinate stage on the Ehrenbreitstein fortress were all taken. Many guests followed us through the whole program which was introduced by Sr.

Lea Ackermann and consisted of a performance by the children choir "mini-MAXI-Singers" from Koblenz, a play about forced marriage, a performance by the dance-group Djamilya from Simmern, a discussion about human trafficking and forced prostitution as well as a musical performance by Django Reinhardt and his band. One of the highlights for the younger guests was our “wheel of truth”. It was similar to a wheel of fortune, with the difference that every field was winning. The children who spun our wheel of truth got some sweets and their parents were given a story about one of the women we were able to help with our work. We also organized a very special photo campaign. The slogan was “I will not say it through the flower (German saying for: “to say something in a roundabout way”) but with a flower!”. The campaign was meant as a symbolic sign against violence on women. You can see the pictures on our website.



„Wheat between the tares“. SOLWODI discussion at the Federal Garden Show

Do not remain helpless and do not allow the forceful to govern you. Go out, get work and stand up for your concerns. „This is what we want to empower the helpless women for“ said Sr. Lea Ackermann during the discussion on the Rhineland-Palatinate stage at the Federal Garden Show in Koblenz.

Prof. Dr. Fritz Köster who has been supporting SOLWODI since its beginnings in 1985 also participated in this discussion. He believes that men and women should emancipate themselves in their own personal ways and that they should try to improve certain conditions in this world. Father Köster puts the focus for this on two levels: “Self-confidence has to grow from below and from above – on the level of the United Nations – the declared human rights have to be followed and violations against them have to be avenged.” Emancipatory improvements were valued highly during the

discussion. Women are becoming partners in their relationships and men start to realize that a partner is a lot better for a successful life than a woman who does not stand up for herself and just follows the man. Sr. Lea thinks that there have to be changes concerning the prostitution being accepted as a normal job. Like Sweden, Germany should also make laws to punish the customers of prostitution as they are the ones who raise the demand for prostitutes and therewith also forced prostitution: „It is not right for one half of the population to be able to buy the other half.“ Sr. Lea states the goal to be

as follows: „Half the sky to the women. Half the earth to the women. Half the power to the women!“

Father Köster focused the discussion on the question about values by saying that the moral concepts affect the situation and climate of society. Some are only about money, food, drinks and sex. But it is more important to think about the meaning of human dignity and how to live by moral concepts based on this dignity. The professor of theology wants the commitment of many initiatives, rather than just putting unsolved problems into focus. He wants the wheat to grow between the tares.

What is a ball doing in a church?

The world championship of women soccer took place a while ago, but at SOLWODI it is still present. Our counseling center for the Ostalb region participated a lot and organized an extraordinary program together with the city of Aalen, the German Catholic Women's Union, the churches and the football association of Württemberg which received a lot of attention by the press. The program started off with a "soccer church service" themed "Women on the ball – for variety and integration". A ball that symbolized planet earth made its rounds in the church and left many visitors surprised by this sportive service. We introduced our African soccer project SOLASA (SOLWODI Ladies Sports Association) at information stands and the market place.



„It was very important for us to focus on the girls and women in Kenya who suffer from poverty, social discrimination and poverty prostitution. We were very excited about the SOLASA project from its beginnings and wanted to support and promote it during the world championship of women soccer”, said Dr. Annette Speidel, co-manager of the SOLWODI center Ostalb, when asked about their motivation. By what she saw, the success of the SOLWODI women soccer teams in Kenya is overwhelming: “We saw with our own eyes how once desperate young women and girls gained new hope through this project and went through a positive development, both physically and emotionally. Through the soccer project they became more active, started to enjoy life and developed team spirit. Being self-confident young women now, they can deal better with winning and losing, just like in real life. They can find their way and get better education. This way they will finally get more respect and acceptance“.

Our fund-raising activities were also successful. About 80 personal letters to local companies, shops and friends as well as innumerable phone-calls requesting support led to donations of over 5,000 Euros. “At the same time we were able to promote the various tasks and offers of SOLWODI and bring our work back into the minds of the people”, said Dr. Speidel happily.

Progress check

“Prostitutes discover the airport as a market niche“. This was the title of an article published in the newspaper “Der Westen“ on August 2nd. Obviously the administration at the respective airport (Schiphol in Amsterdam) does not find this problematic. We wanted to know about the legal situation and received the following answer by the Dutch embassy in Berlin: “In the Netherlands, prostitution is not regulated by law yet. This is why so far there is no legal age for prostitutes. This is supposed to change in the future. In November 2009, the Dutch government handed in a draft law for the regulation of prostitution and for fighting the grievances of the sex industry. Among others, this draft contains the plan for an obligatory registration of prostitutes as well as a minimum age of 21 for prostitution. The law has not been enacted yet.

Contact:

SOLWODI Deutschland e.V. / Propsteistraße 2 / D-56154 Boppard-Hirzenach

Tel: 0049 – (0)6741 – 2232 / Fax: 0049 – (0)6741 – 2310

Email: info@solwodi.de <http://www.solwodi.de>

Bank Accounts

Volksbank Koblenz Mittelrhein e.G.

Acc.-No. 656565 1000

Sorting Code 570 900 00

BIC GENODE51KOB

IBAN DE68 5709 0000 6565 6510 00

Landesbank Saar, Saarbrücken

Acc.-No. 2000 9999

Sorting Code 590 500 00

BIC SALADE55XXX

IBAN DE84 5905 0000 0020 0099 99

Kreissparkasse Rhein-Hunsrück

Acc.-No. 11 270 00

Sorting Code 560 517 90

BIC MALADE51SIM

IBAN DE02 5605 1790 0001 1270 00