

SOLWODI

Solidarity with
women in distress

Solidarität mit
Frauen in Not

Newsletter

No. 74, December 2007

Dear Friends of SOLWODI,

Christmas is always an invitation to a new beginning. A child will be born, and with him the expectation that through this child people will be given a new chance. At the same time we will be strengthened, so as to make the world a better place worth living for this child, a place of peace and justice.

This is our struggle at SOLWODI, for which we have you and need you. Only through your interest and support for our work we can tackle at least a small part of the injustice and violence in the world.

All those who receive our Newsletter can periodically develop a picture of our work at SOLWODI. This is for us a very important means, which gives us the opportunity to remain in touch with you. In this way, we are able to inform you about the suffering of women and children, who in our midst are exposed to violence, coercion and violation of their rights and dignity. On the other hand, we would like that you also rejoice with us over the successes, when a woman, for instance, succeeds in getting through school or in receiving a job qualification in spite of her trauma.

We retain ourselves very fortunate that among all the generous benefactors we have also found *Lotto Rhineland-Palatinate* as a new partner. Lotto supported us this year with numerous donations and events. Moreover, it also bears the expenses for the printing of this newsletter.

The work of SOLWODI depends to a great extent on your donations. For this, at the end of this year, we wish to express you our heartfelt thanksgiving.

Yours, Sr. Lea



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SOLWODI Counselling Centre in Berlin

Since mid-November SOLWODI has finally an office in the German capital city. The kick-off event was the Football World Cup 2006, or more exactly the Sisters of Mary Immaculate, in whose premises at that time the hotline was set up. They were so impressed by our project, that they made the rooms available for a counselling centre. Since the beginning of the year 2007, the two Comboni Sisters Margit Forster and Beatrice Giulia Mariotti have prepared themselves for this task through an internship in various SOLWODI counselling centres. In Berlin there are already some organizations that support migrant women. We hope to closely network with them. Also in the metropolis Berlin, where so many migrant women live, SOLWODI will do a good and important job for women and children in need. Contact: Tel. Nr. 030-8100117-0, Email: berlin@solwodi.de.

10 Years SOLWODI NRW: Flowers for the guests

The big Hall of the Catholic Educational Institution for Families was too small for the many guests, who turned up on 10th October to celebrate the 10th anniversary of SOLWODI NRW e.V. and the counselling centre in Duisburg. "When Sr. Leoni makes an invitation, then people come, because they know the good job that she and her team do", said Sr. Lea Ackermann, who greeted the guests and the numerous representatives of institutions and organisations.



The Mayor Manfred Osenger presented Sr. Leoni Beving, leader of the counselling centre, with a certificate from the Lord Mayor of the city of Duisburg for a decade of dedicated, passionate and competent work in solidarity with the victims of human trafficking. Sr. Leoni and her collaborators thanked in return with an exceptional bouquet of flowers for the help and support that they received in the past ten years.

For each person, to whom they were particularly grateful, they put a flower in a big vase. "We wish", said Sr. Leoni, "that this bouquet of flowers will last long and remain copious."

The main speaker of the celebration, Inge Bell, received after her talk on "The Faces of Europe" a pin with a purple rose as a symbol of the struggle against trafficking in women. Inge Bell, radio and televi-

sion journalist, was awarded with the prize "Lady Europe 2007" because of her voluntary commitment for women and children in East Europe.

The over 1000 women and girls, who received help in the past ten years, were certainly not forgotten. "We are grateful to our women for trusting us", was the conclusion.

10 Years SOLWODI NRW: Conference Day against Trafficking in Women

„Trafficking in women as a modern form of slavery contradicts all the principles of our polity“. These are the words of the conference leader Heinz Meyer at the Catholic Social Academy in Münster, where on 13th October on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the foundation of SOLWODI NRW e.V a conference day on the theme „Getting involved against trafficking in women" took place.

Not only forced prostitution is a political issue, but also prostitution in general, Sr. Lea Ackermann pointed out in her talk. The prostitution law of 1st January 2002, which legalises prostitution in Germany, addresses women who freely prostitute themselves.

Women, who worked as prostitutes and found their way to SOLWODI, make us doubt their voluntaries and self-determined autonomous decision. Family, economic and social dependency put the women in a dilemma. What makes prostitution a political issue? In the Australian Federal State Victoria prostitution is since 1984 legal. According to a study of the University of Melbourne a regular "prostitution culture" was consequently diffused. Sr. Lea preferred the word "*Unkultur* (lack of culture)". Meanwhile, brothels in Victoria are much quoted, owner of brothels enjoy a consideration exactly like headmistresses; young boys grow up with a picture of women created by prosti-

tution and pornography. According to the study, the opportunities for women to get out of prostitution have also become worse, because to meet in brothels or table-dance clubs for a completion of a contract or for career negotiations belongs to the normal male way of doing business—to the exclusion of their female colleagues. Sister Lea's bottom line: "Prostitution damages the entire society, but above all it damages the longing for equality among men and women".

"There is no good, except for the good one does." With this self-explanatory sentence from Erich Kästner, Prof. Dr. Fritz Köster entitled his talk. Where do we experience that the dignity of a woman or of a child is trampled under the feet? Who are the people, who do not deal anymore with others according to human rights and dignity, but according to money, power and claims of domination? In this situation SOLWODI has become something like a prophetic voice,

which puts the finger on the wound of this present moment. This should be also the task of Religion, when it claims to be prophetic. It should respond to shortcomings and should be a midwife for a new life, in a world that tends more to talk than to action. Whoever helps others, is neighbour to himself/herself, whoever helps others to live, makes the experience of an abundant life.

The CEO of the diocesan council of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Cologne presented at the conference the "Association against trafficking in women and forced prostitution in NRW", that feels motivated by what is stated in the German Constitution about the dignity of the human being and by the affirmation of the Christian Creed that men and women were made equal. The non denominational association comprises at the moment 16 organizations (among which SOLWODI) and is coordinated by Norbert Michels.

A modern Christmas Story

By Sr. Dr. Lea Ackermann

In this newsletter before Christmas, I would like to tell you two modern Christmas stories.

The first story tells about Tanja, who, as many of our women, was already neglected in her childhood and then, as a young adult, had to endure a lot of violence from men. This is also the story of Tanja's child, who is yet to be born. However, when he/she will come to the world, he/she will not lie in a crib like Jesus—and he/she will have a better start in life than his/her mother.

Tanja comes from an East European country and grew up in a village with her grandmother, because her mother did not want to know anything about her. When she turned 18 she got married. Her husband beat her, and she medicated her feelings with alcohol. She was 25, when he threw her out of the house, and she landed up in a shelter for homeless. One day four men raped her and dragged her to another village, where she was locked in an apartment. This belonged to a man who called himself "Boss", and who promised Tanja a high-income job in Germany.

In a big German city Tanja was handed over to a pimp, who demanded that she would sit in a "display window" and there wait for her customers. Moreover, he made her sign a contract, in which she would subscribe that within a year she would have to work off a debt of 12,000 Euro for "transfer and mediation charges". She could not escape because she was controlled through surveillance cameras. Her pimp as well watched her closely and came more and more often to collect the money.

One of her customers was nice to her. She fell in love with him and became pregnant. He wanted that she would give up prostitution and move in with him. However, she was afraid of her pimp, and rightly

so. As he found out that she had a relationship and expected a child, he demanded that she would get an abortion. He also threatened Tanja's boyfriend so massively that he cut off any contact with Tanja and did not respond any longer to her phone calls. Because of her child, Tanja took up her courage and finally ran away from the brothel into a shelter for homeless women, which alerted SOLWODI. As Tanja felt safer through our counselling and support, she was also ready to testify to the police. At the moment, she attends a language course and hopes later to find a job and to be able to live a normal life. Since her pimp does not know where she is, she is not afraid any more. Tanja can now move freely—and enjoy her child, whom she will deliver in a few weeks.

The circumstances of the birth of Jesus were for Mary, the young woman of Nazareth, certainly no idyll.

This makes me think of Fatma, who since 2 weeks is in one of our safe accommodations with her four children. When she came to us she had no home, was threatened and was left with nothing. What was sure was that she had to fear for her life, and also that her children would be taken away from her.

When she turned 16 she was forced to marry a man, whom she did not know, and whom she had to follow to Germany without knowledge of the language or the culture. Her marriage was according to the old tradition, in which the husband dominates the wife. From her husband she got her rights of self-determination and education of her children taken away. She lived in the common house like a slave, who can never do enough for "her master". Her own family, as well as her

husband's family made it quite clear to her that that was okay. The approach to the outer world was strictly forbidden. There were few opportunities to learn the German language.

The conflict within the family escalated after the birth of the fourth child. Fatma endured from her husband beatings, rape and attempted killings. Because of her children, she came in touch with Germans who assisted her. She got the divorce, and then came the struggle to get her children. The father wanted the custody of the children, and tried to turn the older children against their mother.

German public offices and establishments as well as friendly relationships helped the young mother with the care of her children, who, as she says, mean "all" to her.

Now in a relative safety from the hunting of her family, Fatma says: "Nobody from my family, nobody from my country and my religion has helped me. I received help only from German people."

I look at her and notice the medalion with Mary at her neck. Mary would understand her. With the birth of Jesus a new law came into the world. Instead of hatred, destruction, subjugation, retribution and revenge, people can love, help, encourage and forgive. Truly a "Good News", a "Happy Message", which brings peace wherever people want what is good.

Jesus said: "The Kingdom of God is already among you, when you are there for one another." We from SOLWODI will be there also next year for migrant women in need—with the support of the many benefactors, without whom we could not do our service.

Our own things:

SOLWODI-books as a Christmas gift

What about a Solwodi book as a Christmas gift? For instance: „Über Gott und die Welt. Gespräche am Küchentisch“ by **Lea Ackermann and Fritz Köster (14,95 €)**? Here Sr.Lea speaks with her long-standing companion about friendship, child education, faith and doubt, the struggle with the Church, the commitment for others and trust in God. In **“Um Gottes willen, Lea!” by Lea Ackermann with Cornelia Filter (19,90 €)** Sr.Lea depicts her adventurous life and her commitment. Or: **„Solidarität mit Frauen in Not“, ed. by Lea Ackermann and Reiner Engelmann (12,90 €)**. In this text and reader, which can be suitable also in the classroom, affected girls and women tell their stories, prominent people write about human trafficking and experts analyse the problem. If you want to give a book as a Christmas gift, please write so in your order. Sr. Lea Ackermann will be happy to sign on request your Christmas gift. Order to: SOLWODI e.V., Propsteistr. 2, 56154 Boppard-Hirzenach, or to info@solwodi.de. Mailing expenses are additional.

Comprehensive Info pull at our website

We always receive requests for written material, because many people do not know yet the comprehensive information in our website.

Under www.solwodi.de in the rubric „Materialien“ we offer as free downloads flyers about numerous issues, the SOLWODI annual reports, Sister Lea’s travelogue from Kenya and Rwanda as well as texts about human trafficking and forced prostitution for prayer services.

If one clicks the rubric „Rundbriefe“, one can read on the screen the articles from the most recent newsletter. After repeated requests we now also offer the complete newsletter in the usual format as a PDF document to be printed out, folded and given out. In the rubric „Rundbrief“ one can also find the sub-rubric „Archiv“ with all the newsletters from July 2003 till date.

Working group in Passau seeks reinforcement

The SOLWODI counselling centre in Passau is supported by the volunteer working group of the diocesan Catholic Women’s Association. In their meetings the members of the working group inform themselves about the following topics: human trafficking, forced marriage, violence against women, integration of migrants and forced prostitution. Moreover, they plan actions to achieve preventive work in schools and in various groups and to raise funds, so that the work of SOLWODI may continue to be carried out. Whoever wishes to be part of this working group is warmly welcome. For further information please contact the diocesan office of the KDFB Passau, Tel. 0851-36361!

Translator needed

We urgently seek a mother tongue English speaker, who would translate on a voluntary basis texts in English for instance for our homepage, but also more complex texts. Whoever would be interested please contact: Tel. 06741-2232, E-Mail info@solwodi.de

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