



PeaceWomen Across the Globe
 FRIEDENSFRAUEN WELTWEIT
 نساء من أجل السلام عبر العالم
 Femmes de Paix Autour du Monde
 Женщины мира за мир на земле
 MUJERES DE PAZ EN EL MUNDO
 Mulheres pela Paz ao redor do Mundo

10 JAHRE
 YEARS

DONNE DI PACE NEL MONDO

ピースウーマン 一國境を越え平和をつくる女たち
 全球女性

Newsletter 1/2015

TOPIC VIOLENCE OF IS AGAINST WOMEN

Dear Readers,

For months now, the terrorist group “Islamic State” has kept the world on tenterhooks as it commits one horrific act of violence after the other. We report on the situation of Kurdish women who have been directly affected, and get personal insights from two of our PeaceWomen. With terrorist violence also having a major impact on life in Nigeria, we round off the topic with a short report on Boko Haram and the girls they have abducted.

Violence against women is also the subject of our article about femicides in Mexico. For many Mexican women, violence is a sad fact of everyday life. This makes PeaceWoman Nuria Costa’s dedication and unusual approaches to educating people and changing mentalities all the more important.

In addition to these serious matters, we also have some happy news for you. We are celebrating the ten-year jubilee of 1 000 women being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. A wide variety of activities are in the pipeline, and we will keep you updated about them throughout the year.

MEIKE SAHLING, PWAG DIRECTOR

A Question of Power – Women as War Trophies

Hundreds of Yazidi women and girls are still being held captive by the terrorist group Islamic State (IS). Those who have managed to escape talk of horrific violence. Yet the actions of the IS militants do not just affect their immediate victims. Our PWAG coordinators in Jordan and Egypt tell us about how they are experiencing the situation.

While former residents of the Kurdish city of Kobani in northern Syria prepare to return home, many women and girls are still being held captive by IS militants. They are mainly Yazidis, members of a Kurdish minority, and were abducted from their villages last August. Many are thought to have been given to fighters as war trophies or sold on from the Iraqi city of Mosul. Fifteen-year-old Arwa managed to escape and later spoke to Amnesty International about her abduction: “We were held in a house with five other girls. There they did to me what they did to many other girls. I was raped.”¹

Psychological support needed

Arzu Güngör from the International Representation of the Kurdish Women’s Movement says many of the Yazidi women and girls who escaped IS are now living in refugee camps close to the Turkish border: “It’s a precarious situation and the women aren’t receiving any kind of psychological support. Things are far too chaotic for that.” Güngör and her network are trying to work out how to help them: “One solution would be to set aside part of the Kurdish city of Rojava for the women.” This would allow them to recover from their ordeal in peace, away from other people. However, Güngör says it is impossible to get the project funded because no one is

Top: Arzu Güngör (left) of the International Representation of the Kurdish Women’s Movement at a solidarity march in Bern, February 2015.

¹ Amnesty International, Escape from Hell. Torture and Sexual Slavery in Islamic State Captivity in Iraq, 2014, Page 5, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/escape-from-hell-torture-sexual-slavery-in-islamic-state-captivity-in-iraq>



TOPIC VIOLENCE OF IS AGAINST WOMEN

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willing to spend money when things are so unstable. Life in the refugee camps is incredibly hard: “Winter is tough. The tents are bitterly cold and food is a problem. Most of the camps were actually designed to hold far fewer people and are now desperately overcrowded.”

A question of money, glory, power...

Neighboring countries are now also home to many people who have fled IS. Jordan alone has taken in some 600 000 Syrian refugees. They make the conflict tangible for the Jordanian public. “We get a lot of media reports about Daesh, as we call IS, and about the crimes against Yazidi women,” says Faiha Abdulhadi, PWAG coordinator for Jordan. She says there is a lot of solidarity with the refugees, but adds that the help falls far short of what is needed.

The king and queen of Jordan repeatedly speak out against religious extremism. Abdulhadi says this reflects the general sentiment in the country, with most people condemning the acts of violence. Nevertheless, Jordan also has IS supporters: “Some Jordanians feel as if no one is listening to them. So many people are uneducated, unemployed and living in poverty. A very small percentage of people in that situation eventually think, ‘to hell with all this’, and join a terrorist organization because it offers them the chance to change their situation.” The fact that IS rewards its fighters generously – with money, cars, houses and women – is a big motivating factor.

... but not religion

Abdulhadi deplores the fact that all sides are essentially being forced into a religious conflict. She believes that IS has absolutely nothing to do with Islam as a religion and stresses her point with a joke: “A man and a woman are ambushed by two IS fighters, who tell them to recite some verses of the Quran to prove that they are Muslim. The man – a Christian – recites a few verses from the Bible. The two attackers are so convinced by his performance that they immediately free him and the woman. Later, she asks him how he did it. He answers: ‘Do you honestly think those men would have forced us to do such a thing if they were really Muslims?’”

Sympathy and concern

Yasmine Arafa, our PWAG coordinator in Cairo, says that IS has also become an everyday topic in Egypt. She explains that Egyptian sympathy for Syrians is palpable, but that people are also afraid that the influx of refugees could exacerbate the already high levels of unemployment: “It’s a mixture of sympathy for others and concern for one’s own survival.”

The former residents of the city of Kobani, the first of whom are starting to make their way back home now, are probably also concerned about the future. IS has been forced back just a few kilometers, large parts of the city are in ruins, and many women and girls are still missing. It is hard to imagine that anything resembling normality will return here any time soon.

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Top: Women, men and children fleeing IS
militants leave the Sinjar mountains for western Kurdistan.
This picture is probably from August 2014.



Left: Children and teenagers learn in a playful way to respect nature and their fellow human beings, summer 2014.

TOPIC FEMINICIDIOS IN MEXICO

“Every Element is Important for the System to Work”

Murders committed against women and girls are a huge problem throughout Mexico. Many of the crimes are feminicidios, which means they are motivated by sexism and misogyny. Our PeaceWoman Nuria Costa is working to ensure that girls and boys learn how to treat each other and their environment with respect.

Seven women are murdered in Mexico every day. The deaths are mostly the result of extreme domestic violence, acts linked to organized crime, or murders committed against female journalists. It is estimated that around half of the crimes are feminicidios, murders motivated by sexism and misogyny. Many of Mexico's states have either a non-existent or incomplete definition of what constitutes a feminicidio. Nashieli Ramírez, a member of Mexico City's human rights commission, says it is absolutely crucial that precise criteria are defined and that feminicidios are actually recorded as such: “If the law doesn't set out the correct definition, too many subjective elements end up playing a part in investigations and in the courtroom.” In certain states, for instance, someone accused of murdering a woman can claim mitigating circumstances if the crime concerned a “question of honor” or happened within a relationship.

Ramírez says the appalling crimes can largely be traced back to the conservative values that are widely held throughout the country: “A lot of people think that violence against women is a private matter, and that women who are raped or murdered somehow brought it on themselves by the way they behaved.” Ramírez also points out that Mexico's drug war means levels of violence in the country are high overall, and that efforts to teach children about peaceful conflict resolution are sorely lacking.

Respect and love

Nuria Costa, PeaceWoman and PWAG coordinator for Mexico, agrees. Her projects are helping rural areas with conflict prevention and with using natural resources in a sustainable way: “Murders committed against women have a lot to do with the way resources are managed. Poverty is on the increase in rural areas and this is leading to more violence. The men quickly turn to crime because they have few other alternatives. Rural communities also often lack understanding about the role and rights of women.”

To address these problems, Costa began organizing summer courses for children and teenagers in the state of Guerrero in 2011. She says it is important to consider the issues of gender, peace and sustainability in combination: “We take a holistic approach. The kids learn that everything in an ecosystem has a function. Every element is important and they all have to cooperate if the whole system is going to work.” The concept can also be transferred to human relationships: “Our activities teach the kids that everyone is equal and deserving of love and respect – the same respect that we should give our environment.” Costa says she sees changes in the children and teenagers who have attended her course. They are fairer in the way they treat each other, and less violent.

To ensure that feminicidios are not just properly documented and end in more convictions, but actually stop altogether, Mexican society will have to transform itself from the ground up: “Adults won't change,” says Costa, “but children are the future.”



Apropos

Sending Girls to School – a Threat?

The ongoing conflict in Nigeria, Africa’s largest economy, goes back almost six years and has made more than a million people refugees in their own country. Attacks by the terrorist group Boko Haram are becoming more brutal and the death toll is soaring. Now many parents are considering stopping sending their daughters to school, as girls are in particular danger.

Over 240 schoolgirls were abducted in April 2014, but little has been done to find them so far. Some of the girls managed to flee, but 219 are still missing. The survivors tell of horrific lives in captivity¹, of forced marriages, forced labor, rape, psychological abuse, and forced conversions to Islam. “Girls and women suffer the most under terrorism,” says Justina Ngwobia of the Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Movement (JPRM).²

Women like Esther Ibanga, founder of the Women Without Walls group, want to signal their opposition to the status quo: “We want to do away with the walls that divide and separate us, whether it’s the walls of social class or the wall of ethnicity or the walls of religion. We are mothers. We are life givers and we are solution bearers. And we think that we should bring solutions to the table.”³ Nigeria’s former education minister Obiageli Ezekwesili also still cannot believe that the schoolgirls have been abducted. Along with three other women, she launched Bring Back Our Girls, the online campaign that caught the world’s attention. Today, Ezekwesili continues to organize protests to put pressure on the international community and her own government.

¹ Human Rights Watch
² Frankfurter Rundschau, Jan. 27, 2015
³ PRI, Jan. 14, 2015

Top: Participants at the third PWAG regional dialogue forum in Marsa Matruh, Egypt, November 2014.

News & Jubilee

From our projects

The National Dialogue Forum will be held in Alexandria from May 13 to 16, 2015. National and international experts, government representatives, NGOs and PeaceWomen from our network will come together to work on a national strategy for ensuring political participation of women in Egypt.

10 years PWAG – and the network keeps growing

One thousand women were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. Ten years on, the topic of peace is more relevant than ever. With that in mind, we want to mark this anniversary with a variety of activities at the national and international level.

As part of the Women Seriously campaign, PWAG is organizing Peace Tables in ten countries and calling for more women to be included at negotiating tables.

June 2015 will see the launch of our WikiPeaceWomen project, a virtual platform that will document PeaceWomen’s stories. Our goal is to go from 1 000 women to 1 000 000!

Forthcoming events – save the date!

Early May 2015, Bern
PWAG General Assembly

Week from June 8 – 15, 2015, Switzerland
Event with Rose Wawuda,
PWAG coordinator in Kenya

October 19 – 23, 2015, Switzerland
Jubilee Week: “10 years PWAG”
We will be organizing talks, roundtables and exhibitions, and inviting national and international PeaceWomen and experts to participate.

More information is available on our website or from our International Secretariat in Bern.

Solidarity

Peace needs us – and we need you! Please support our work by making a donation or by buying a “peace share”.

Many thanks!

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You will find further information on our events and activities on our website, where we also present each PeaceWoman of the Month:
www.1000peacewomen.org



Our **Blog** provides information on the work of our global network:
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