Farewell, Meike

The news of Meike's death was sprung on us last week as a blow amidst happy summer days. Colleagues and friends are deeply shaken. Meike was born on 18 September 1965 and died of malaria in Uganda at the end of July, 2019. She was just 54 years old.

Meike Sahling joined PeaceWomen Across the Globe in 2012. She took over as Executive Director of the organisation during a period of change and upheaval, an organisation struggling for its identity and fighting financially for its survival. There were, therefore, many challenges.

Meike took over - or rather, Meike got on with what needed doing. She loved establishing contacts within the PeaceWomen co-ordinators’ network, completing projects, inspiring people, providing impetus and listening. Learning from the PeaceWomen around the world was important to her. She became involved, negotiating with partner organisations in various countries. She was a feminist and a pragmatist; flights of fancy were not her style - she was objective-oriented, curious and down to earth.

With her small team she achieved a lot: barely in post, she organised the 10th anniversary celebrations of PeaceWomen Across the Globe and ran a public Swiss Women's PeaceTable on Berne’s Münsterplatz, in which women from around ten countries from the Global South participated. They discussed how women perceive and strive for peace. So very many people came and took part in the debate ... we were overwhelmed!

Meike was responsible for the Dialogue Forum in Egypt, where local women’s organisations in various parts of the country exchanged views on their ideas of lasting peace, the prevention of sexual violence, their participation in the elections and in the political power structures of their country. A substantial package of measures was submitted to the government in Cairo.

It was with particular care that Meike took part in the long-term project on violence against women, carried out by Peace Women Across the Globe, together with women's organisations from Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. Meike always participated personally in the annual workshops. She wanted to know first-hand what the women had to say and where changes and resistance to laws and regulations were planned.

PeaceWomen Across the Globe’s source of added value is its worldwide network of PeaceWomen that developed between 2003 and 2005. Burning questions were how it should continue to exist and be invigorated; how the contacts would be organised and what global networking and communication should look like.

Meike was a good person. She loved her work and if needs be, fought for her ideas in Board meetings. She networked with other Swiss women’s organisations and worked with them on, among other things, the Civil Society Alternative Report to the 1325 National Action Plan. She enjoyed the intellectual challenge involving women and peace.

At the end of 2016, Meike left PeaceWomen Across the Globe. When she finally held her Uganda contract in her hands, the usually rather controlled and thoughtful Meike was beside herself with joy. She loved Uganda, loved being close to people and their lives, close to the issues of the day and very close to the political issues that moved the people.

Many women who Meike worked with have written to us. Meike's sudden death has touched us all. We have all lost a kind, loveable friend, someone committed to women and to peace-making. We are so sad.

Ruth-Gaby Vermot, Co-President PeaceWomen Across the Globe