

Newsletter: NWP FOCUS

News from the Network Women's Program

Issue 1, 1998

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1. NWP and GSN Run the Transnational Training Seminar on Trafficking in Women

"I want the United Nations to be involved, I want to raise global awareness of how serious the problem is," declared Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, about the issue of trafficking in women. Susan Soros introduced Robinson who addressed the representatives of over 100 NGOs from 37 countries at the Transnational Training Seminar on Trafficking in Women coordinated by the Network Women's Program and the Global Survival Network, June 20-24, in Budapest.

Trafficking women for the sex trade puts hundreds of thousands of women throughout the world at risk of losing their personal freedom, suffering physical and emotional harm, working in degrading and sometimes life-threatening situations, and being cheated of their earnings. Wishing to flee economic hardships, unsuspecting women answer advertisements to work abroad as waitresses, models and cooks. They often sign a contract with a trafficker stating the debt owed and the responsibility to work until it is paid off. Once a woman arrives in the receiving country, her passport is confiscated, and she is forced into prostitution. This begins her debt bondage, a form of modern slavery. Even women who choose to work abroad as prostitutes do not realize that they are signing away their freedom and human rights.

The Transnational Training Seminar on Trafficking in Women convened to address this issue, raise public awareness and formulate a plan to eliminate trafficking. In addition to plenary sessions, workshops gave participants skills needed to comprehensively fight trafficking: Promoting Awareness; Providing Victim Support; Developing Relations with Governments; Campaign Strategies; Research and Documentation; Fundraising and Organizational Development; and Networking with Other NGOs.

The massive political, social, and economic changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union allow criminal elements to flourish in the international illegal business of trafficking in women. Oksana Horbunova of the organization La Strada in Ukraine stressed that the majority of the unemployed in Ukraine are women. The United Nations estimates that as many as four million people are trafficked around the world each year, resulting in profits to criminal

syndicates of up to seven billion dollars annually. Participants agreed that governments must view trafficking as part of the greater economic crisis and its biased effect on women.

Robinson and participants stressed that trafficking constitutes a human rights violation as well as an economic problem. In response, Robinson called for the UN and the world community to take comprehensive action. This action must focus on protecting and compensating trafficking victims including providing them with psychological and legal assistance. As well, participants demanded the end of treating migrant sex workers as criminals which "adds to the burden of women who are already victims," stressed Robinson. Most receiving governments treat trafficked women as illegal immigrants and part of organized crime. By tightening immigration policies, governments only increase migrant women's dependence on traffickers. Increased prosecution of illegal migrants makes women hesitant to report abuse to authorities because they know that deportation means retaliation by criminal syndicates if the debts are not repaid or if the woman is suspected of providing information to the authorities.

The conference concluded with the development of national and regional campaign plans, and the drafting of recommendations. As requested by the participants, organizers paired specific countries of origin with countries of destination to exchange materials and to discuss strategies for regional cooperation. In the next few months, participants will begin implementing their national and regional campaigns.

As a follow-up to the conference, a grants program funded by the Network Women's Program and participating National Foundations of the Soros foundations network will begin. The program is designed in collaboration with the Global Survival Network and the Witness Project of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights and will support the development of these national and regional campaigns to stop human trafficking. For more information on the small grants programs or to receive a copy of the recommendations, contact [mailto: jkanics@igc.org](mailto:jkanics@igc.org) .

Thanks to Gillian Caldwell, Director of the Witness Project, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights and Jyothi Kanics Co-Director, Human Trafficking Program, the Global Survival Network for their contributions to this article.

2. NWP Initiatives

Violence Against Women Encourages and supports the development of sustainable women's NGOs that can respond to the problem of violence against women through the Women-friendly Response to Violence Against Women project, the Service Support Initiative for Women's NGOs and the Transnational Training Seminar on Trafficking.

Women and Education Promotes cross-national collaborations to introduce and institutionalize gender/women's studies initiatives through the Inaugural Network Conference in Gender/Women's Studies, a Network Gender Studies Directory, Women's Program Fellowships, the Library Core Collections Project and the Translations Project.

Women's Participation in Public Life Supports five-member country teams of women leaders to

participate in a two year training program, Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women, to educate, empower and connect a core group of international human rights activists.

Technical Assistance to National Foundations and Network Programs Provides gender-related technical assistance as an ongoing process of increasing gender awareness among staffs and boards to achieve gender balanced organizational structures and processes; bringing gender sensitivity into all programmatic areas and stages of program design, implementation and evaluation; and establishing gender equity in resource allocations.

Information, Documentation and Media Provides a forum for information exchange on women's and gender issues in the OSI network through a listserv, website and newsletter.

Women's Health, Reproductive Rights and Sexual Rights Prepares projects to address specific areas of women's health such as the Breast Cancer Risk Reduction project, and an educational program on women's reproductive health and rights.

3. La Strada, Ukraine Fights Trafficking in Women

In Ukraine, awareness about trafficking in women grows daily because of the work of women NGOs, such as La Strada. First organized in 1995 as a joint project of women's groups in the Netherlands, Poland and the Czech Republic, La Strada expanded into Ukraine in 1997 and into Bulgaria recently. La Strada's activities educate the public that trafficking in women poses a problem for the entire society.

During a training visit to the United States, La Strada Ukraine President Kateryna Levchenko explained that La Strada's activities in Ukraine include four components:

The information campaign establishes contacts with the media focusing on youth magazines and newspapers. La Strada also works with the international press to exchange information.

The lobby campaign maintains a network of individuals and institutions to effectively lobby local and international governments. These advocates for the rights of trafficked women include individuals from parliament, political parties, border agencies, embassies, ministries, health institutions, NGOs, and the police. These individuals advocate for the rights of trafficked women.

The social support campaign includes a hot-line in Kyiv. La Strada also offers support for Ukrainian women trafficked abroad, and assistance re-entering Ukrainian society after deportation.

The education campaign operates through leaflets and lectures aimed at young girls, teachers and social workers. La Strada also conducts training workshops throughout Ukraine for women and girls.

For more information, contact La Strada, Ukraine by email: lastrada@fahi.gluk.apc.org or by

phone/fax: 380 44 224 0446.

4. Romany Women Meet to Identify Issues

Romany women activists held the first multinational Romany Woman's Congress in Budapest, June 10-13. Women from Macedonia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Germany and Spain attended the meeting sponsored by the Network Roma Participation Program.

Conference sessions addressed the following issues: tradition and modernity in the life of Romany women; sex discrimination; violence; activity of Romany women's NGOs; women's human rights; international instruments on women's rights and Romany women; education (with emphasis on children's education); health; media outreach; and others.

The conference combined presentations, analysis and strategy setting. Outcomes of the meeting included the following decisions:

- 1) To establish the first International Association of Romany Women
- 2) To establish the International Day of Romany Women - June 10.
- 3) To recommend that the Roma Participation Program of OSI open a competition for a new staff position of coordinator working on the issues of Romany women.

At the invitation of the conference organizers, Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, Debra Schultz and Eva Foldvari of the Network Women's Program attended the meeting with the goal of working toward future collaboration.

For more information about the conference, contact: Azbiya Mamedova, R.C.S str. Suto Orizari 15, 91 000 Skopje, Macedonia, Tel/Fax: 389 91 618 575.

5. The Women's Program of OSF-Albania

In August 1994, the Open Society Foundation for Albania awarded its first grant supporting women's issues to the women's NGO, "Refleksione." The grant established the Women's Center to coordinate activities for Albanian women's NGOs.

The Women Center's first project created an Information and Documentation Center for gender issues and a coordinating center to network and lobby for new women's associations. Through these two initiatives, the Center fostered networking and information sharing among existing women's NGOs.

When the grant to establish the Women's Center was awarded, the Open Society Foundation for Albania supported neither a Women's Program nor a Civil Society Program. The grant was

awarded under the category of "Other," which classified projects not falling under any existing program at the foundation. Based on the success of the Center, the foundation established a separate Women's Program in 1995. During its first year, the Women's Program operated with a budget of \$60,000 with a Program Director, Valdet Sala, and an Advisory Board working out of the Center.

The Women's Center worked to build an informal coalition of diverse women's NGOs. This coalition worked together to start two initiatives: the Women's Legal Group and the Women's Health Group. The Women's Legal Group offered legal expertise to the women's movement's lobbying efforts. The group succeeded in introducing the first articles on sexual harassment into the new Labor Code in 1995. The Women's Health group produced a six-part television series on women's health issues.

Some of the main campaigns the Women's Center coordinated during 1994-1997 were educating women as voters, increasing women's participation in decision-making, and sharing information at the grassroots level on the Beijing Platform for Action. The Center also disseminated information on the women's situation in Albania.

In 1998, the Women's Center became independent from the Open Society Foundation for Albania while still receiving some financial support. The Center also receives funding from SNV/The Netherlands, United States Information Service, the Embassy of the Netherlands, UNICEF and the United Nations Development Project.

The Women's Program continues as a separate program at the foundation functioning simultaneously as an operational and grant-giving program. The 1998 priority areas are:

- Women's involvement in political and public life
- Economic empowerment of women
- Domestic violence issues
- Women's education
- Gender perspective in educational curricula
- Capacity-building for women's NGOs

The Women's Program currently funds or co-funds the following projects at the Women's Center:

- Data base on gender issues
- Training seminar, "Discrimination of Women in the Workplace"
- Training seminar, "Building Women's Machinery"
- Albanian Group for Breast Feeding Protection

For more information, contact Valdet Sala at vsala@osfa.soros.al.

Thanks to Valdet Sala, Program Director, Women's Program of the Open Society Foundation for Albania and Delina Fico for their contributions to this article.

6. NWP Holds Its First Women's Human Rights Training

With support from their national Soros foundations, twenty-two women activists from Georgia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan met in Kyiv, Ukraine from July 22-27, 1998 for the first one week training seminar of the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training Seminar for Women. They became the first group of NWP Human Rights Fellows. The NWP sponsored the seminar in cooperation with Women, Law and Development International (WLDI), a non-profit organization located in Washington, DC. WLDI developed the content of the training using the manual they wrote jointly with Human Rights Watch, Women's Human Rights Step by Step. WLDI Executive Director Margaret Schuler and Emelina Quintillan, Director for Human Rights Training, conducted the training seminar.

The training consists of three one-week seminars over an 18-month period with technical assistance provided to the participants between the seminars. Over the six day period, fellows learned about the history of human rights and received an overview of the international human rights mechanisms that can be used to advocate for women's human rights at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Training exercises involved using human rights documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to address violations of women's human rights.

Martina Vandenberg, a researcher for the Women's Rights Project of Human Rights Watch, led role plays on how to conduct a fact-finding investigation, including interviewing survivors of rights violations, to document human rights violations as part of an advocacy campaign. The final part of the training enabled participants from each country to join together to develop an advocacy strategy around an issue which they will work on for the duration of the training period.

Each training is hosted by a national Soros foundation and a local NGO. Olena Suslova from the local organizing NGO, the Women's Information and Consultative Center, also participated in the training as a fellow. In addition to including the skills she learned into national trainings that her organization conducts for women activists, Suslova hopes that this training will help her and women from CEE/NIS to contribute more substantively than in the past at policy-making meetings at the international level. "I plan to use the training for concrete actions. Usually, we try to do something and after it we try to learn about it. We can use these skills now to advocate for women's human rights in Ukraine. Our center is a member of the Karat Coalition, which is concerned with the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. We plan to write a shadow report on the national machinery for the implementation of the Beijing platform. I hope that at the next women's forum, our region will not be the non-region."

Participants represented women's organizations addressing many different issues in their countries, such as domestic violence, trafficking in women, discrimination against women in the workplace, unemployment of women, low legal literacy of women, and traditional attitudes that discriminate against women.

Rosetta Aitmatova, head of the Republican NGO "Women Support Center," said that the Kyrgyzstan team will have a nationally focused campaign. Aitmatova's organization provides information, consulting and legal aid to women who live in rural and urban areas, specifically in the Naryn and Talas Oblasts. "One of the most urgent problems in our society is legal education of the public. I have been thinking for some time that it would be good to produce a publication for women where one part will be devoted to legal problems." Aitmatova explained her interest in this training seminar: "I suffered the dangers of the totalitarian regime. In 1937, my father was oppressed. I know what it is like to be family of a public enemy. I hope those times will never come back, because there were the greatest violations of human rights. I want our society to become a real civil society. Maybe that is why, despite my age, I take part in the women's movement."

For some participants, in addition to learning about the human rights instruments, the training was also a place to share their experiences and to support each other in their challenging activities. Nato Shavlakadze recently began working at the Women's Club "Peoni" in Georgia. She identified women's employment, family and sexual problems as the most prominent issues facing women in Georgia today. Shavlakadze said that in Georgia, "It is not assumed that women have the same rights as men. Women who are smart have a difficult time just because they are women. When we are in our own countries we think it is hopeless, but because there were examples from other countries and we spoke with people from other countries, we were empowered." When asked what she wishes for the future, Shavlakadze responded, "Men would respect women more than they do now, and that it would be easier for women to realize their potential."

"Sometimes we don't realize that we really have rights," said Adilya Irisbekova of the Business Women's Association in Kazakstan. She will use the training to help enforce her government's implementation of national laws and international commitments to protect women's rights. Irisbekova hopes to educate women that they have human rights that can and should be protected using international mechanisms. Women need to change their mindset to understand, "It's not just because I want this, a job, etc., but I really have a right to it. Kazakstan has just signed CEDAW. I want to begin an educational program in my region to educate women about this document."

Evgeniya Kozyreva, also from Kazakstan, has been the head of the Feminist League in that country since 1993. The Feminist League, one of 40 women's organizations in Kazakstan, is active in many areas, but its main focus is public awareness of women's issues. Kazakstan is currently in the process of ratifying new laws. Although she now knows how to use international mechanisms to protect and enforce the rights of women, Kozyreva said that her dream is that "If we have perfect laws, we will not have to complain to international bodies."

The team from Uzbekistan explained that although their country has legislation protecting the rights of women, the laws are not enforced in everyday life. Therefore, they will be developing a strategy to improve the legal literacy of women in several regions of the country. Marina Sereda of the National Human Rights Center of the Republic of Uzbekistan left the training with a clear understanding of their mission for the next several months: "Our task is to give not only women

information on their rights but to inform the whole society that women should be active, that she is a person who has equal rights in society, that everything that happens in the country should involve her. All women should be active in law-making, not only women who have high positions in ministries."

The NWP, together with national Soros foundations, is also supporting women from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mongolia, Poland, Russia, Turkmenistan, and Yugoslavia to participate. These participating countries have divided themselves into three groups, and the first training seminars for each group will take place in the fall of 1998.

For more information, contact Kate Blumenreich at pshifman@sorosny.org

7. The East East Program Focuses on Women's Issues

The East East Program promotes cooperation among foundations in the Soros Network by bringing people, ideas and experiences together from all the countries in the Network. The cooperation encourages people to share information and exchange experiences in addressing common issues of countries in development. In the first half of 1998, the East East program supported several network-wide projects focused on women's issues.

January 20-24, Pustcha-Vodytsya, Ukraine
2nd International Meeting of the NIS-US Consortium of Women's Organizations

February 12-16, Samara, Russia
Humanistic Psychology and Women's Issues

March 5-8, Belgrade, Yugoslavia
Women's Rights: 20 Years of the Women's Movement

March 13-15, Zagreb, Croatia
Project Coalition: How to Say No to the Boss

March 16-20, Warsaw, Poland
Women in Transition Economies, Visit to Poland of Representatives of Women's Organizations in Ukraine

April 22-26, Struga, Macedonia
Regional Women's Lawyers Meeting

May 7-10, Iasi, Romania
Network for Gender Sensitive Training

May 18-23, Dubrovnik, Croatia
Women and the New Militarization of Europe: Implications and Impacts

June 4-7, Podgorica, Yugoslavia
Spreading the Network against Male Violence against Women

June 5-7, Zagreb, Croatia
Women within Civil Initiatives

September 17-20, Prague, Czech Republic
Women and Theology in the Period of Transformation: Meeting of the European Society of Women in Theological Research

8. Upcoming NWP Events

October 14-18
NWP Women's Program Coordinator Meeting, Ohrid, Macedonia

October 19-24
Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women for Croatia, Macedonia, Russia, Albania, Czech Republic and Bulgaria (host country)

November 22-27
Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women for Russia, Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Lithuania and Poland (host country)

November 23-29
Women-friendly Response to Violence Against Women Training, Budapest, Hungary

Nov. 30- Dec. 3 Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Turkmenistan and Belarus in Budapest, Hungary