

Creating awareness of human dignity

The topic of our conference is promoting human dignity to prevent trafficking and addiction.

There are two aspects to this topic: The external and the internal part.

External aspect

The external part refers to government actions and decisions as there are:

- ❖ The paramount challenge for the EU in the next years will be to improve the economic situation in the acceding countries
- ❖ Especially for Germany it is important to stop pseudo marriages because the 'so called' husbands take the money and the women go empty handed.
- ❖ Working permission for female dancers should only be granted after having scrutinised the working place.
- ❖ Effective protection of witnesses and victims, residence permission for victims
- ❖ Therefore education of the woman in the poorer parts of the EU is important inclusive establishing Hotlines. As article 1 of the German Constitution says: "The dignity of the individual is inviolable. To respect and protect this, is the duty of governmental authority"
- ❖ Waking the sensitivity of the punters (suitors, Johns), so that they become aware of their responsibility toward the fate of the victims. Sweden could drastically minimize trafficking and prostitution in not allowing the purchase of sexual services. Internationally, this was the start. "Customers" are charged with sentences up to 6 years and traffickers who bring in prostitutes even up to 10 years.

With this, the market shall be contained, instead of putting endangered women into prison. This legislature is backed by 80% of the population. The result is respectable. Today Stockholm has only between 105 and 130 prostitutes compared to Oslo with 5000. Another benefit is that compared to other European countries very few women are brought into Sweden by trafficking. Comparable numbers in Finland are 10.000 to 15.000 foreign women while Sweden has only 400 and 600. The neighbouring countries are trying to find a similar solution to prevent trafficking.

Because of increased competition and higher risk of violence the Swedish government tries to take better care of the women working in prostitution. There are more social institutions that actively help the prostitutes to get out of their dilemma. They receive drug rehabilitation and other necessary treatments. Most of them have been misused at an

early age by relatives and suffer from psychological and emotional problems. It is an important insight that there are no, nor can there be happy prostitutes.

First and foremost, prohibition, as seen by Sweden's example, brings about a change in society. When school children already learn that purchased sex is illegal then this will no longer be regarded as a norm. This is already part of the inner aspect, raising the consciousness and creating awareness in society.

Internal aspect

One of the most important prevention aspects is the creation of awareness of dignity in the human society, especially regarding the dignity of women. Throughout Europe, the media, advertisement and the fashion industry have misused the beauty of woman thus undermining and injuring the dignity of women. Everyone is continually bombarded with a torrent of violence in literature and film with the most realistic portrayals of all types of sexual relationships, rapes and murder, usually of women.

At no other time in history has there existed such a proliferation of pornography in books, magazines, videos, films and television. With the help of the media, a billion dollar industry conveys the message that the brutalizing, torture, enslavement, mutilation, contempt and humiliation of the female sex is equivalent to sexual pleasure.

A great deal of advertising, on television, in the internet, in magazines, on posters, misuses and markets the female body. This type of advertising has already become so "normal" that it is used for almost all products, from automobiles to groceries, from cigarettes in all types of magazines.

In this way the view of woman is distorted and she is degraded merely to the role of sexual object. This has nothing to do with how the equality of women has been touted in our society. If we continue to tolerate this type of misuse of the female body then we open the door to violence against women and offend the very dignity of woman. The misuse of woman's body and the degradation of sexuality in media are just the beginning of the most common human rights violation in the world today - the abuse of women.

What does "Dignity" mean?

Maria Fernanda, Trafficking-Victim from Colombia, reports: „I started living on the streets when I was 11 years old – my father threw my brother and me out of the house. He never worried about us – he was always taking alcohol combined with drugs. On the streets, I met prostitution and crime. One always dreams about being somebody, and that having material things makes you

somebody. I never imagined that, wanting to improve my living conditions, I was going to end up losing my dignity.”

I would like to reflect on the meaning of dignity. From the old German language, ‘wirdi’, or from medieval German language ‘wirde’ we recognize a linguistic connection with the term ‘value’. Surely similar clues can be found in different languages and provide insight into contents and significance. The first to have formulated the term ‘dignity of the human being’ was the Renaissance-philosopher Pico della Mirandola. In his speech ‘De hominis dignitate’ (Latin translation: “About the dignity of the human being”) (1486/87), he shows that man is free to determine his nature in accordance with his own will. Pico della Mirandola emphasised man’s freedom and God given ability to rise to the vision of the deepest secrets of the universe. Literally, he says: ‘what an enormous and admirable happiness of the human being, to whom it is given to have what he desires and to be what he wishes to be’.

R. Bach lets his seagull Jonathan say the same with the words: ‘we are free; we can fly, wherever we want, and be what we are.....’

Dignity therefore is within us from the very beginning of life.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant spoke of the universal dignity within each human being. He said: ‘Each person honours the human dignity through his/her own person; has the right to receive respect from others, for the said human dignity ; and is in turn, obliged to respect the human dignity in those nearest to him...’

This means that it is important to grant dignity first to myself and to be free of any doubt concerning it. Dignity is an immanent nature, an innate character of humans, independent from any other characteristics such as age, intelligence, abilities and sex.

There are two definitions of dignity which complement each other: Dignity as a feature and dignity as commission.

Dignity as a feature we find in the Christian teaching of man being created in the image of God and in the Declaration of Human Rights: - “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

The very first Declaration of Human Rights is found in the Old Testament, „So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female He created them.”

Genesis 1:26, 27. That means that every human being has been created in His image, without any restrictions of gender, race, intelligence or faith.

This Bible passage has been nominated by Michael Horowitz, a leading US Human Rights Lawyer, as the greatest revolutionary statement ever made.

Dignity as commission is the idea of ethical autonomy of people as we find in the Enlightenment and also in the philosophy of Kant. Dignity as commission can be directed to the individual as well as to society.

In his discourse on “Grace and Dignity” (1793) Friedrich Schiller defines dignity as commission directed to the individual as follows:

“The control of sense drive through moral strength is freedom of spirit, and the expression of this phenomenon is called Dignity. Dignity has various degrees, approaching grace and beauty, it is called noble and touching (at the verge of) awe, it will be called sovereign. The highest degree of grace is "magical", and the highest degree of dignity is Majesty.”

Dignity as commission directed to the society is defined in the Human rights declaration: “The dignity of human being is inviolable. It is the duty of all governmental institutions, to respect and protect it. “

This year is the 60th anniversary of the declaration of Human Rights. Therefore I want to briefly remind us of the importance given to human dignity in the Human Rights Charter.

In the Preamble we read:

- Whereas ***recognition of the inherent dignity*** and of the equal inalienable rights of all members of the human family ***is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world ...***,
- Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their ***faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women*** and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

In the Resolution 217A (III) of Dec. 10th, 1948, General Assembly of the United Nations we read:

- Article 1. ***All human beings are born free and equal in dignity*** and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.
- Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, ***sex***, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth

or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

- Article 3. ***Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person***
- Article 7. ***All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of the Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.***

Why these laws and resolutions are necessary and why is it still important to speak about equality of gender?

I want to have a brief look into how the awareness of women's dignity was lost.

History taught at schools begins with the civilization of the Sumerians, Egyptians and Greek. Only little knowledge is conveyed about the previous cultures

There have been hundred thousands of years of Palaeolithic culture centring on women and 8000 years of city cultures based on partnership of men and women with a high developed standard. All signs suggest that this have been peaceful cultures because no weapons and demonstrations of repression, slavery and/or wars were found at archaeological excavations. These societies had goddesses at the centre of their worship.

These cultures came to and end 2000 BC. The decline of the gynocentric society began with the wave of invasions of Indo-European pastoral tribes who brought with them their gods of war. The core of their system was that the power to take life was considered to be higher than the power to give life. Power was considered to be synonymous with conquer and destroy. The original meaning of power as the live-giving and nourishing force was forgotten. Women had their decision-making power and spiritual authority taken away from them.

The Writing of history by the patriarchal cultures begins. This history is viewed from a clearly andocentric perspective¹. If one leafs through commonly available history books one finds that they are strangely almost exclusively referring to the exploits of men. Women are generally depicted

as intriguers, troublemakers and power hungry rulers.

In the antique world, the beauty of a woman was demonised as dangerous and seductive for men. Greek philosophers claimed that men were human beings in the fullest sense and women some deficient being, the result of spoilt sperm. For Aristotle women only served as the medium through which to produce children.

Around the beginning of the Common Era a movement began, inspired by the teachings of Jesus Christ, which brought with it the beginnings of equal rights for women. He shocked the religious authorities with his announcement that Jews and Greeks, menials and free persons, men and women are all spiritually equal. In early Christianity women held high management positions. Gatherings often took place in the houses of its female followers. However, Jesus' insight that our spiritual evolution would lead, through a new values system which includes female values, to fundamental change in our society could not be accepted by the authorities of the day and still cannot be accepted today.

After Christ, the great church father Augustine adopted the inheritance of Neo-Platonism whereby for him man stands over woman like the soul over the body, the higher over the lower.

Thomas of Aquinas adopted the views of Aristotle and many of the church fathers followed this same way of thinking. There was even discussion that woman must resurrect as a man to be saved. They imagined a Heaven without women or at least that women would be below men in the hierarchy.

Tertullian (200 years after Christ) accused women of being responsible for sin and temptation and that mankind was destined to die because of them. It went as far as to make woman responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.

During the dark centuries of the inquisition the Hammer of Witches or "Malleus maleficarum", from 1487 degraded women into imperfect animals. Sexual lustfulness was only identified with women. Even as late as 1910 Max Funke, a German philosopher, wrote a book in which he wished to prove that women are not human beings.

Fortunately there were in history also men who defended the dignity and rights of women. In the Middle Ages an outstanding champion of the rights of women was Friedrich von Spee. He fought against the eradication of witches at the risk of his life.

So what have women themselves done to protect their value and their dignity?

In the Christian field there is very clearly a history of feminine theology traditions from the female disciples of Jesus over deaconesses and woman

¹ Androcentrism is the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing male human beings or the masculine point of view at the center of one's view of the world and its culture and history. The related adjective is androcentric

preachers in the original Christian congregations through to the female mystics of the Middle Ages.

The Venetian theologian and author Christine de Pizan (1405) wrote in “Book from the City of Women” about this female history of theology which has been so persistently hushed up. She said the works of women are ladders which lead to Heaven.

Since 19th century especially the women’s movement, the different waves of feminism have contributed regaining the awareness of women’s dignity.

There have always been great women in history who were a source of hope for others, who pointed out the way to a dignified life and lived it as an example. I wish to thank all of them. It would take too long here to mention them all.

However, looking at the present situation here in Europe and worldwide still a long road is ahead of us to bring back the awareness of the original value, the original beauty of the woman to the home of the human family. This is the background of the campaign “Dignity of Women”. The main focus is educational and trying to raise the awareness in society for everything which is violating women’s dignity.

Later on this evening we will set milestones on our way to living our dignity. On Sunday then we will look into the practical application listening to the reports of various WFWP representatives.

As women, we cannot longer stand by and witness the degradation of our dignity. Wir können nur etwas ändern, wenn wir uns selbst unserer Würde bewusst sind und dieses Bewusstsein weitergeben.

Thank you WFWP Germany 25/06/2008