

3RD WORLD CONFERENCE OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS
FROM 3-6 NOVEMBER 2015 IN
CONFERENCE CENTER WORLD FORUM - THE HAGUE, THE NETHERLANDS

MOTTO: CONNECT AND ACT

At the request of the Global Network of Women's Shelters (GNWS), the Foundation of Women's Shelters in the Netherlands and its partners organised from 3-6 November 2015 in Conference Center World Forum in The Hague, the 3rd World Conference of Women's Shelters.

I was privileged to attend such an event where women and men, all around the world came to share their experiences and ideas with the ultimate objective of achieving an international approach to the prevention of violence against women and children. In total around a thousand people from over a hundred countries took part in the conference in The Hague.

The event was even more interesting and attractive by the presence of Her Majesty Queen Máxima. On the morning of November 4, 2015, **Her Majesty Queen Maxima of the Netherlands** held a keynote speech under the theme, *Economic Independence of Women Survivors* focused on the economic independence for women who face domestic violence which is the basis for building a new and independent life.

After the plenary session, Queen Máxima attended part of the 'Effective social and economic reintegration of women survivors' workshop.

Her **Royal Highness Crown Princess Mary of Denmark** also attended the conference on Thursday, the 5th of November. The crown princess gave a keynote speech during the plenary session entitled, *Continents: What is Going On? Strengthening Global and Regional Networks*. Through The Mary Foundation she works to help women and children who are victims of violence.

Main conference themes:

Day one: Wednesday 4th November

A) Economic independence of women survivors

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

- Her Majesty Queen Maxima of the Netherlands

KEY SPEAKERS and PANELLIST

- ✓ Gerlinde Silvis (Director Human Resources Rabobank)
- ✓ Ludo McFerran (National director Safe at Home, Safe at Work Australia)
- ✓ Iffat Gill (Founder & CEO ChundriChoupaal)
- ✓ Gudrun Burnet (Co-founder Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance)
- ✓ Mary Balikungeri (founder of Rwanda Women's Network. Chair African network of Women's Shelters)

Education and economic independence offer the best means to prevent violence against women. Many women cannot participate in society as citizens in their own right because of the violence they experience. By focusing on women's individual strengths and participation in the economy, we will create a better future.

Parallel sessions of lectures, workshops, roundtables, poster sessions, panel sessions included topics like: Entrepreneurship for women from shelters, Safe at Home, Safe at Work: The Perfect Union, Empowering survivors of VAW to increase participation and economic independence, Domestic Violence and the role of Housing cooperations, Importance of community mobilisation and empowering women, Pro-active measure to reduce violence against women, Community based alternatives to shelters, Digital High to independence, Working with city councils to generate mass awareness campaigns

On this day of Conference I attended the workshop on Effective Social and Economic Reintegration of women survivors, held by: Annette Eggen, Pernette van der Werff, Saliha Ramay and Shabana Arif, who work together in India, in a project for women called Rozan and in the Netherlands, in NVR & Federatie Opvang. Both shared their new empowerment method called "New Future" that transitions women on welfare to self-sufficiency and how their piloted program brought strong results. Both organization presentations were inspiring and nurturing.

B) Sustainable financing and advocacy

KEY SPEAKERS and PANELLIST

- Michaelia Cash (Minister for Women, Minister for Employment, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service, Australia)
- Bathabile Dlamini (Minister of Social Development, South Africa)
- Aldijana Sisic (Chief, UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, UN Women)
- Julia Djarova (EY, Women.Fast Forward/Europe)
- Patricia Vargas (Executive director of Safe Place, Edmonton. Boardmember Global Network of Women's Shelters)
- Yuan Feng (advocate for Women's rights and gender equality in China)
- Fatima Outaleb, Morocco. Staff at UAF (L'Union de l'Action Féminine) shelter management programme
- Inge Verdaasdonk (National panel for women in women's shelters in the Netherlands)
- Vidar Vetterfalk (Psychologist & International Project Leader Men for Gender Equality)

In many countries, despite the huge demand for shelter, women's shelters struggle to exist. Shelters need sustainable funding and support. Funding is needed to hire and retain staff and for activities such as awareness raising and lobbying. Funding is also needed to support organisational sustainability, so executive directors in these organisations can consult with experts in daily operations and fundraise effectively. Moreover, the lack of data collection and information analysis of services offered and the need of survivors make it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of policies at all levels. To address this issue, partnerships with local and national authorities, funds, civil society organisations, and companies need to be created to provide support for shelters.

Parallel sessions of lectures, workshops, roundtables, poster sessions, panel sessions included topics like: Innovative methods for working with the media to prevent violence against women, Safety, Advocacy & Intervention in Government funded Shelter, The importance of building partnerships – the case of the Orange House Approach, Flexible Funding to Help Survivors Avoid Homelessness, Domestic Violence Victim's Support and Women's Shelter in Japan, A Comparison of Women's Shelters in Urban and Rural Areas, Client participation, Commitment of men and boys in the process to eliminate VAW, family justice centres.

Day two: Thursday 5th November 2015

C) Transboundary violence against women: international exchange and cooperation

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

- ✓ **Denis Mukwege**, Gynecological surgeon; founder and medical director of Panzi Hospital in Congo, president of the Panzi Foundation, Sakharov Prize 2014 winner.

KEY SPEAKER and PANELLIST

- Corinne Dettmeijer (National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children)
- Margarita Guille (documentary Ruta 94) – Mexico. Executive Coordinator Inter American Network of Women's Shelters.
- Yanar Mohammed – Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq

In addition to sexual and domestic violence, women worldwide are also subjected to other types of violence, including trafficking of women and children, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honour-related violence, and rape as a weapon of war in increasing areas of conflict. Refugee women, and migrant women are particularly vulnerable. Because they often lack a private network of resources and support, they must rely on women's shelters. Part of them are undocumented with little perspective for a safe and financial independent future. Due to the cross-border nature of these forms of violence, international cooperation and exchange between shelters and various partners, such as law enforcement, is imperative.

Dr. Denis Mukwege, a leading human rights activist from the Democratic Republic of Congo, discussed his work at the Panzi Hospital in the DR Congo, where he works as a gynaecologist, specialising in the treatment of women who have been gang-raped by rebel forces. The women he treats in his hospital refer to him as their “father.” For all the neglected women and girls in the Congo that have been rejected by their families and their communities, Dr. Mukwege is one of their biggest allies and advocates. Not only does Dr. Mukwege help survivors, but he believes that the solutions lie with those women who were strong enough to survive these atrocities and brave enough to stand up to the continuing violence.

Parallel sessions of lectures, workshops, roundtables, poster sessions, panel sessions included topics like: Engaging Shelter Programs in Cross-Cultural Exchange, Re/integration of the victims of trafficking: how we can do better, International cooperation between women shelters: challenges and good practices, Peace Educational after war, and how to help the victims to overcome traumatize,

Combining Law enforcement and care in our combat against domestic violence, Worldwide combat of honour related violence and forced marriages.

On this day of conference I attended a workshop held by **Yanar Mohammed**, a women who runs in Iraq and NGO called Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq. For me it was the most inspiring and powerful workshop.

Yanar Mohammed founded the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq in 2003, with the main focus of providing shelter for vulnerable women from honour killing and trafficking. Throughout 12 years of work, Yanar has organized 5 teams of sheltering women in the cities: Baghdad, Samarra, Karbala, and recently Zakho. Her operations of sheltering currently protect 32 women, some with their children, with special focus on women escaping ISIS enslavement. In spite of many death threats and governmental television censorship, Yanar persevered in pursuing her objectives towards achieving gender equality in Iraq.

In the current global conflicts between ISIS and local communities in Iraq, women became objects of political victory and defeat. When those victimized by ISIS escaped their enslavement, they did not find support within their patriarchal communities which considered them "dishonorable" and undesired. OWFI was the first NGO to respond within days to women under ISIS, addressing them with feminist solidarity messages, promising protection for those who need it. In a country where the government does not see the need to protect women "from patriarchal violence, OWFI sets the model for other NGOs and for the future governmental missions. Addressing the need to international partners and allies was a main source of empowerment, and The Hague is one of the best places to get a response. OWFI has created a model of feminist struggle towards equality, which can be reproduced in many of the Mena countries which are subject to similar conflicts and challenges.

D) Continents: what is happening? Strengthening global and regional networks.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

- Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Mary of Denmark

KEY SPEAKERS

- Therese Evers (former police officer)
- Rashida Manjoo (Former UN special rapporteur on Violence against women)
- Dubravka Simonovic (UN special rapporteur on Violence against women)
- Marleen Temmerman (Director Reproductive Health and Research WHO)

- Rosa Logar – Member of Grevio, (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) chosen by Council of Europe to monitor Istanbul Convention. Also: president of WAVE
- Maja Groff – Senior Legal officer of the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference on Private International Law
- Bandana Rana, Chair Global Network of Women’s Shelters, presentation GNWS Global Datacount to Crown Princess Mary of Denmark

The World Conference of Women’s Shelters is not an isolated event. It is part of the long-term strategy of the Global Network of Women's Shelters to connect and strengthen women’s shelters worldwide. The reinforcement, preservation and expansion of the existing network will take centre stage both during the run-up to and throughout the World Conference. The conference offers a unique forum for the regional networks and special networks like the international network of indigenous women’s shelters. Joining forces at the regional level helps influence legislative alignment and realise implementation. Although there are great examples of international and national legislation, implementation is a problem in many countries. Shelters will be able to connect and strategize on how to support the implementation of violence against women legislation in their countries.

Day three: 6th of November

E) Innovative approaches to eliminate violence against women and to support survivors

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

- ✓ Ashley Judd, Actor, author, activist and humanitarian

KEY SPEAKERS and PANELLIST

- Antigone Davis (Head of Global Safety Facebook)
- Cindy Southworth (National Network Ending Domestic Violence, US)
- Brittany Smith (Google Public Policy strategy)
- Chetan Sharma (executive director of Datamation and founder of the Datamation Foundation)
- Emma Murphy (Survivor - who shared her story on Facebook - 9 million views)
- Julie Oberin (WESNET Australia)

Women’s shelters and their partner organisations have tremendous knowledge and expertise on addressing violence against women. The conference offered the ideal platform for shelters and partner

organisations to share innovative insights, methods and approaches, such as focusing on strengths, multi-agency approach, programmes for children, community support, providing help online and e-learning opportunities. Some innovations bring benefits and challenges, such as the challenge to keep the Internet accessible and safe for women and their children. Or the challenge to work with both parents with the aim to reduce violence without putting women and children at risk. Addressing these concerns requires collaboration among a variety of partners as law enforcement, public prosecutor's offices, Internet providers as well as women's shelters to represent the experiences of women and their children. In addition, researchers shared their data and analyses to offer fresh impetus and ideas to everyday practices.

Parallel sessions of lectures, workshops, roundtables, poster sessions, panel sessions included topics like: The interaction between religion and domestic violence, In the face of domestic violence: Compromised parenting and the impact of the supportive mothering program, Technology, Privacy, and Safety and Violence Against Women, Integrating Reproductive and Sexual Health Rights in Preventing Violence Against Women, Overcoming Tradition in Religion to Rescue Survivors, We Can Young and Sexting, Listening to the voices of children affected by witnessing domestic violence.

Religion can be a roadblock, which can force victims to choose between safety and their faith. It often keeps victims in an abusive relationship or does not offer them the support they need. But what do the scriptures of different faiths tell us when we look at them from a different perspective? Can a church be a safe haven for abused women? Can religion and spirituality be important resources in addressing domestic violence? Similar questions come from Nigeria and The Netherlands, but what about the answers? These were some of the questions Charlotte Wassenaar tried to answer in her workshop on faith and domestic violence: What's faith got to do with it?

Each day of the Conference had a survivor invited who share their story of struggle, humiliation, faith, courage and power.

I would like to finish this short resume of such wonderful and enriching experience with the words Linor Abargil, Israeli beauty queen who was abducted and raped in Milan, Italy two months before being crowned Miss World in 1998, and who ten years later is ready to talk about it – and to encourage victims of sexual assault to speak out:

WOMEN TOGETHER IS POWER!

Sr. Adina Balan, CJ