

medica mondiale – from 1993 to 2008

It is fall of 1992, a brutal war is being waged in the Balkans, thousands of local girls and women are being raped; soldiers are converting hotels and factories into brothels, in which women are kept imprisoned for days or months at a time. When the young gynaecologist Monika Hauser learned of this through the media, she decided: I have got to do something. She was also enraged at the way the media reported on the women and thus abused them a second time. To make a long story short, she went to Bosnia and against all odds, opened the Medica Zenica Women's Therapy Centre in April 1993 in cooperation with around 20 Bosnian doctors and psychologists.

Over the years thousands of severely traumatized women have received help and support there. All of them had experienced and survived horrors. Thanks to the Medica Zenica Therapy Centre, at last these women and their children have a safe refuge where they can obtain gynaecological care and psychological help all under one roof. Here they can live without fear and many of the young women learn trades and professions. In the first year ca. 4,000 women received general medical, gynaecological and psychiatric care. As did many more in subsequent years - frequently under extreme and adverse conditions such as the military blockade, which almost completely cut off Zenica from the outside world in the mid 90s.

Meanwhile, 1993 saw the founding of a society and the establishment of an office in Cologne. At the end of 1993, Monika Hauser was chosen "Woman of the Year" by the German news program ARD-Tagesthemen – an event followed by around 750,000 DM in donations.

The *medica mondiale* concept of providing support to women wartime rape victims was successful: in the aftermath of the major offensive of the Yugoslavian army in 1999 in Kosovo, additional women's therapy centres were founded in the town of Gjakova and in the Albanian capital of Tirana. In this conflict as well, it was once again the women who were the victims of expulsion, torture, and rape. A survey in Kosovo confirmed that one out of three women suffered sexualized violence during the war. In Kosovo and in Albania, *medica mondiale* gynaecological ambulances and psychosocial counselling centres provided the so desperately needed inpatient as well as outpatient care.

The next major challenge for *medica mondiale* began in Afghanistan, after the fall of the Taliban. The situation for women in that country is tragic: 85 percent of Afghan women can neither read nor write, young girls are forced into marriages with older men, women have almost no rights and are subject to extreme violence. *medica mondiale* started the "Doctors of Hope" program, in which German-Afghan doctors provide health care to women, and developed a training program for health professionals, midwives, psychologists, and nurses, who are trained in women-specific trauma care.

Local *medica mondiale* lawyers provide legal services to women prison inmates, most of whom were incarcerated for so-called moral crimes: adultery or running away from home. Because the cultural background in the host countries is of paramount importance, *medica mondiale* makes every effort to obtain clarification and information from responsible offi

cials in government ministries and the judiciary system, as well as from the police and religious leaders.

In 1997 *medica mondiale* launched the "I will get involved" campaign, in which it espoused women-specific policies in refugee legislation for dealing with hardship cases. Women victims of wartime violence should be protected from forced repatriation and retraumatization. In 2005, *medica mondiale* confronted the German public with the delicate discussion of rape during and after World War II. Thanks to the "Time to speak" campaign, the women who experienced such suffering, which had been a taboo subject for so long, finally have a voice 60 years after the end of the war.

Along with the development of another project in Liberia in 2006 and the support of women's organizations in war and crisis zones throughout the world, such as those in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Sudan, India, and East Timor, political human rights activism has become the second major focus of the work of *medica mondiale*. The goal is to make it clear to society and government that these crimes are human rights violations with serious consequences. Professional conferences, action days, press conferences, and the publication of professional literature as well are just some of the components of the whole concept.

An example of another component of this concept is the presence of *medica mondiale* expert observers in the International War Crimes Court in The Hague since 2000. In 2001, the court sentenced three accused criminals to long prison terms for "sexual slavery" and "crimes against humanity". "That the World may know" is the title of a highly publicized *medica mondiale* documentary on these proceedings, known as the Foča War Crimes Trial after the Bosnian city of the same name. Another success of the many years of mission work by *medica mondiale* and other women's and human rights activists is that the bylaws of the International Criminal Court now list rape along with sexual slavery, forced prostitution, and forced pregnancies as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In August 2008 *medica mondiale* launched a multi-year campaign: "In service of women in war and crisis zones". The goal: To increase public awareness of the subject and to bring about political action in order to drum up more support for the victimized women in these zones.

A few weeks later *medica mondiale* hosted an international convention with top experts from ca. 20 different countries. The title of the event was "The search for justice" and the topics were rights and justice for women victims of sexualized wartime violence.

It is now the end of the summer of 2008, 15 years after the founding of the organization. There are 29 employees (19 full time, 10 part time) in the Cologne office working on behalf of war-traumatized women. They are supported by interns and ca. 130 volunteers throughout Germany. There are around 180 women involved in the international projects.