



*On Excursion in Minsk*

**WSCF-E Lingua Franca  
Stop Being Silent!  
Minsk, Belarus  
25-30 August**



From 25-30 August, 20 participants from throughout *Lingua Franca* Central and Eastern Europe gathered in Minsk, Belarus for the third and final training of the WSCF-E Lingua Franca campaign, *Stop Being Silent!: Identifying, Overcoming and Preventing Domestic Violence*.

To begin exploration on the topic, participants divided into small groups to play a version of Memory, which allowed them to explore common myths relating to domestic violence and their corresponding facts. Jaanus Teose, a psychology graduate student and the former WSCF-E gender coordinator, from Sweden, led an introductory session on “What is Domestic Violence: Identification and Warning Signs.”

***Domestic Violence and the Body***

Knowing ones own personal boundaries often can help one to avoid situations of violence. In exploration of this, all joined in a role-play examining these boundaries. Participants explored their needs of personal space with others: parents, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers on the street. How close is too close? How does body language convey boundaries?

Marta Guvstavsson, a theology student from Sweden, gave an interactive lecture on globalisation and the body. She examined the multi-faceted relationship of globalisation, views of the body, theology, and violence, and invited all to reflect on these in relation to domestic violence.

Dr.Valli Batchelor, an activist from Malaysia, led an interactive session on “Redefining Domestic Violence: Sexual Exploitation in the Church.” She focused on the issue of clergy sexual violence against women. In most of the world, religious leaders are not subject to the same punitive codes that are applicable to professional caregivers. The victims of clergy exploitation often fall through a deadly loophole that can have devastating results on the individual. This presents a challenge to churches and congregations, for as Paul says, if one part of the body suffers, all suffer. Valli also led participants in dance to help release through movement the challenging stories they had heard. Valli shared a session about her work with “Journey Towards Hope”, an intercultural project which works to break down barriers and empower women through dance.



*Introductory Session*



*Dance led by Valli*

***Domestic Violence and Society***

Dr.Agnes Galajda, a Hungarian judge, started the Hungarian Association of Women Judges and has done much pioneer work in Hungary to ensure that victims of domestic violence are protected by the legal system and to raise awareness about the issue among her judicial colleagues. Her session on “Domestic Violence and the Legal System” examined legal protections, including the restraining order, which are used to protect victims. She also examined the challenges which make it difficult for these cases to reach criminal courts and receive verdicts before major injury or death.

In the panel discussion, Matlab Asgar from Azerbaijan, Nino Kikvadze from Georgia, Madalina Milan from Romania and Jaanus Teose from Sweden, answered questions about gender, family roles and expectations, the general public understanding of domestic violence, and about legal protections and support for victims in their counties. Much discussion was generated as all participants reflected farther on the situations in their home contexts.

Using a thermometer exercise, participants physically stood at various points to express their agreement or disagreement with statements such as the following: Jealousy is a normal part of a relationship; no means no; if a person is abused in a relationship, he/she has some blame for what is happening. All discussed their opinions on the statements. Using a four corners exercise, participants went to different corners to express their responses to various situations. In one situation, you realise that a colleague at work has some very



*Session Warm-up*

unusual bruises, and you think she may be facing violence at home. What do you do? Participants discussed their potential responses and real situations they faced in the past.



Morning Prayer

**Study and Prayer**

In the Bible study on “Christ and Four Women in the Gospels” participants divided into four groups to study passages about risks and healing (Mark 5:21-43), condemnation (John 7:53-8:11), worship and anointing (Luke 7:36-50), and prejudice and faith (John 4:1-42). Participants explored these questions in small groups and plenary: Is there any violence in this text? What barriers are present? What are the responses of the disciples, the women, Jesus and/or others? Is a cycle of violence broken? Does any vindication or healing take place?

In the daily ecumenical prayers, participants joined together in prayers reflecting on domestic violence in the world today. In the Sunday morning prayer, participants reflected on the stories of women throughout the Bible and

on women silenced throughout history. This prayer has been a tradition throughout all three *Stop Being Silent!* seminars. In denominational prayers, participants created and shared liturgies based on their own home traditions, thus allowing all to learn from and share in the diversity present.

**Relaxing Together**

In the Movement Market, all shared about their home SCMs and NGOs, and had to answer the question, “If your SCM was a type of transportation, which would it be?” Answers ranged from a submarine, a rocket, to an old Soviet Car that just keeps pushing on. All ate chocolate while watching *Chocolat*; the protagonist's struggle with the silence of the strict social and religious community related closely to the topic.

On the intercultural evening, participants shared food and presentations from their home countries. A Belarussian band joined the party. The leader shared about the history of the Belarussian bagpipe and led all in traditional dancing.

A local SCMer led the participants on a tour of downtown Minsk on the excursion day, and all shared dinner together at a local restaurant. Many gathered back at the venue to watch *North Country*, a film based on the true story of Lois Jenson, who spoke out against the discrimination and severe harassment she and others faced as females working in the iron mines. Her amazing courage led to a court case which set the precedent for legal code against sexual harassment throughout the world.



Coffeeshop on Excursion



Almost Everyone

**What can we do?**

A young activist led a session about activism and campaigning in the local context, giving examples of what young people can do in response to the injustices they face. Much discussion was generated through his stories and examples. His examples clearly showed how faith and action intertwine, as he emphasised that without God and prayer, none of these other things could be accomplished.

In the closing session, participants acted out various scenes relating to domestic violence in short skits. The audience was invited to watch the skits, and then to yell “break” and jump in to take the role of one of the characters in attempts to transform the

situation. All reflected on this and the challenge of “What can we do?” before moving on to the evaluation. Participants shared dinner, games and free time together. The highlight of the farewell evening was when many went to share the dances they had learned throughout the week out on the streets.

The week provided an enriching and challenging time of dialogue and learning together about the topic of domestic violence in homes, churches, communities and nations.

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