Dear participants,

dear all friends,

Welcome to all of you who are here to listen to Panel V, to follow the presentation of the IAW Project “Water and Pads for Schoolgirls – Empowerment for Life”

I see friends from DFR, from IAW, from NGOs with close ties to DFR.

I see also guest speakers who are here because they are dealing with other aspects of the agenda of this high-level international seminar on «Women – Peace – Security». Once again Welcome.

Unfortunately, a lack of lasting peace is being signalled to us in some of the countries where IAW member-organizations stand ready to start working with schools and their students.

Let me start with a confession: Until 18 months ago I myself was not aware that the Menstrual Hygiene Management is a huge problem for schoolgirls in rural areas of low- and middle-income countries. This means member organizations of IAW were concerned, Ursula Nakamura had heard about the plight from young Nepalese women at WHO, and the IAW Commission on Health wanted to present a resolution to the Triennial IAW Congress in Nicosia.
I shared ideas with commission members, and Ursula put down her concept of a project which we presented a year ago. It was adopted in October 2017 in Nicosia and detailed work was to start. Ursula and me, we both were chosen as IAW project coordinators and a project-steering group with Anuarite Siirewabo DR Congo, Signe Vahlun Denmark, Ruhi Sayid Pakistan and Seema Uplekar India was established. IAW President Joanna Manganara was always kept informed, and Lene Pind, Head of the IAW Communication Unit, took care of the regular news-update of the project. IAW actors at various levels co-operated, and we are happy to be able to show you now our presentation. It tells you where we are now and what remains to be done.

What has such an everyday-life topic about women’s hygiene to do with a high-level international seminar on «Women – Peace – Security»?

Most of the people present in this room might be surprised, but in fact this is one of the origins of discrimination and violence against women particularly in many low-income and conflict-shaken countries. UNICEF and WHO having done research on health-education focussing on the menstrual hygiene management in various countries, were alarmed about the complete lack of financial and human resources to protect millions of girls and young women regarding their monthly periods and their sexual and reproductive health.

IAW as a global women’s organization with member organizations based in Africa and Asia saw a chance of tackling this problem.

It was evident that problems around the monthly period of school-girls are very much related to other issues in the poor rural regions.
The project therefore addresses several sustainable development goals of the UN Agenda 2030:

**UNITED NATIONS**

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD

![Goals icons](image)

Goal No 3 Good health and well-being

Goal No 4 Quality education

Goal No 5 Gender equality

Goal No 6 Clean water and sanitation.

Here are the facts about the disastrous situation school-girls are confronted with in these poor rural regions:

**Facts**

- Menstruation is often a strong taboo, intertwined with myths,
- lack of sanitary pads,
- use of unhygienic old rags or herbs,
- no separate toilets for girls and boys,
- no privacy,
- no hand-washing facilities,
Facts

• often infections in genital area,
• risk of harassment, violence and even sexual assault,
• permanent fear and threats prevent girls from studying,
• only safe place is at home.

Facts

No pads – instead use of old unhygienic rags during menstruation

No toilets - instead hiding in the bush

Only shabby latrines for 700 school-children
Detrimental consequences:

- Girls in poor rural areas are missing classes up to 5 days per month,
- Due to the recurrent absences the girl students have an increased risk of dropping out of school.

At this point the IAW project “Water and Pads” wants to step in by bringing this precarious situation to an increased worldwide attention and by strengthening the respective national women’s organizations in their efforts for equality of boys and girls in sexual health education.

These are the goals of the WP-Project:

**Goals of the IAW/AIF Project**

**dismantling**

- barriers which prevent girls from attending school during their menstrual cycle in the African and Asian region,
Fortunately IAW can count on its IAW member organizations in Africa and Asia. We saw that our IAW colleagues are the best experts, because they are working in the field and have excellent contacts with the local people and regional authorities.
First step of enacting the WP-project: A first questionnaire

At the beginning of 2018 we were sending out a questionnaire to 15 IAW member organizations for more fact-finding in Africa and Asia.

We asked them for more general information about their region, and whether they would like to participate in the WP-project. The response was very positive and simply overwhelming:

11 organizations gave us a feedback. Almost all of them pointed out the same problems:

At the same time all of them wanted very much to participate with the WP-project.
Besides of answering only by yes and no seven IAW member organizations gave us a detailed account about the health-situation in their country. They voiced their strong concern about school-girls, who during their period are often victims of harassment and societal exclusion. More over due to the lack of health education they are an easy prey of rape, unwanted pregnancies and forced marriage. This is even more aggravated in zones of military conflict such as DR Congo.
These seven IAW member organizations had already experience with the issue or had very realistic and accurate plans how to promote the sexual health of school-girls.

IAW, being confronted with all these needs had to set priorities: On one side IAW would have to start a huge fund-raising campaign to acquire the necessary sum for e. g. sanitary installations or pad-producing companies. On the other side the great majority of IAW member organizations was urgently asking for some health-education as soon as possible. So at the moment IAW is primarily concentrating on health information.
The next step a second questionnaire:

Now we were addressing these seven IAW member organizations with a second questionnaire, also in view of potential future sponsoring.

This time each one of our IAW colleagues went out in a remote area and got in direct touch with one specific rural school. Together with the responsible people of the teaching-teams they were writing down their realistic demands in their school-settings.
When receiving the answers by beginning of September 2018 we were again completely overwhelmed.

For people living in industrialized countries it is unimaginable under which extremely bad conditions these children and their teachers have to struggle for education!

6 primary and 4 secondary schools were visited. Most of them have mixed classes of girls and boys. The majority of them are very poor public schools, and most of the teachers are male. The infrastructure in these rural schools is generally very unsatisfying. All children have to walk for long ways from home to school and often are also badly nourished. There is almost no public transportation.
In the remote areas there are no sanitary facilities at all. If the school is lucky one can get possibly water from a bore-hole or cistern close-by.

School in Cameroon:
No easy access to water - no public transportation
The young children get some general education, whereas in secondary schools beginning at age 12 one can choose among languages or sciences etc.

There is no health education at all except for a minimum teaching on the secondary level starting at age 12.

Sexual health and the menstrual hygiene management are never mentioned in school.
We also wanted to know, **how there could be a collaboration between the schools and the IAW member organizations.**

All teachers questioned stated that they want to provide lectures about health to the children, but they desperately lack financial resources and possibly also lack qualified people or have a too crammed curriculum. They all feel that it is very urgent to talk openly about the taboos around menstruation. This would give more self-confidence to the girls and a better understanding to the boys of the life-cycle of both sexes. Almost unanimously the respondents wanted to start with an age-adapted sexual health education at age 10. Some prefer mixed classes and the others separate teaching for girls and boys. Some want the education provided by the school team and the others by experts from outside. When asked about the teaching-methods they all wanted to begin with small printed booklets for the school-children. If ever there might be enough money for big technical installations the teachers are also open for using films, videos, websites, apps. etc.
Third step – where can IAW find the appropriate teaching-material?

Thanks to unicef with its worldwide “Wash in Schools” campaign there are booklets for around ten years old girls which fits perfectly to our context. In our search we were helped by Anne Pelagie Yotchou from Cameroon. We got in touch with Unicef in Malawi and Burkina Faso, and we hope to get the copyrights.

In close collaboration with Anne Pelagie we also want to promote a teaching-tool for students age twelve and older based on a publication by Swiss Sexual Health.

Here we are at the moment. Our IAW colleagues in Africa and Asia hope to get the teaching-material as soon as possible. Although a tremendous amount of work is done on a voluntary basis, one has to cover certain costs. Because we are still in need of some finances, we are very happy about all donations – e.g. online on the IAW website.
Water and Pads –
the school-girls are thankful
for your help!

www.womenalliance.org

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN
ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES FEMMES

Donations & Membership

Donation to following project:
Water and Pads

Water and Pads for School-Girls –
Yes to the Empowerment for Life!

Thank you for you attention!

www.womenalliance.org

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