

**Conference report**

**Dignity across  
Borders**

By  
Lise Østby  
The Northern Feminist University  
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# Conference report, Dignity across Borders

Kirkenes, November 29<sup>th</sup> – December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2005

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## Preface

The Dignity Across Borders conference was held in Kirkenes, Norway, from November 29<sup>th</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2005. It was organised in cooperation between The Northern Feminist University ([www.kun.nl.no](http://www.kun.nl.no)), Network for Crisis Centres in the Russian Barents region and the Barents Region as a whole (NCRB) ([wwwedu.oulu.fi/ktl/NCRB/](http://wwwedu.oulu.fi/ktl/NCRB/)) and the Nora crisis and incest centre in Kirkenes.

The conference took place to finalise this part of the NCRB cooperation, the exchange program between crisis centres in the Barents region. The aim of the conference was to discuss the issues of violence in close relations, democratisation processes in the Barents region in a gender perspective, and trafficking and prostitution in the Barents region. The participants were practitioners and researchers within the different fields across the Barents region.

The conference was held thanks to economic support from the Barents Secretariat, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Directorate of Children and Family Affairs, the Nordic Trafficking project, the County of Finnmark and FOKUS.

We would like to thank keynote speakers Carita Peltonen, Britt Kramvig, Tove-Lill Labahå Magga, Riitta Pohjoisvirta, Linda Dyrliid, Lise Bjerkan, Mildred Hedberg and Lubov Shtyileva for their valuable contributions. We would also like to thank workshop chairs Wenche Jonassen, Aino Saarinen and Mildred Hedberg for their efforts, and plenary chair Lise Nordbrønd for guiding us through the conference, keeping track of the discussions and keeping us all in line.

## Introduction

The Dignity Across Borders conference was held from November 29<sup>th</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup> in Kirkenes, Norway. Russia, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Sapmi were all represented. 75 participants from a number of organisations around the Barents region met to focus on the issues of:

- violence in close relations
- democratisation processes in the Barents region in a gender perspective
- trafficking and prostitution in the Barents region.

The occasion of the conference was also to mark the finalisation of an exchange program among crisis centres in the NCRB (Network for Crisis Centres in the Russian Barents region and the Barents Region as a whole). This took place during 2004 and 2005.

The conference gave the participants the opportunity to discuss the important questions outside the traditional frames of the different institutions. Crisis centre workers, activists, researchers, social workers, bureaucrats and others was given space to confront important issues that are interrelated and connected to each other, but often separated by scientific and political borders. Democratisation processes, violence in close relations and trafficking and prostitution are interrelated and international issues. When the problems cross borders, the solutions must also be found in cross-border cooperation. In her presentation, Britt Kramvig pinpointed one such example of interrelatedness; the situation in Finnmark at the moment. There is huge development connected to the oil industry and the development of the Snøhvit area. This seems to have inspired an all-over Klondyke mentality, and it is seen as a project

that potentially can save the northernmost region of Norway from depopulation. However, the development is not all-out positive for women. The numbers of crisis centre contacts in the area have increased considerably since the development project started. If the development in this area does not include women nor includes a gender perspective, there are risks that there will not be sustainable solutions created in the area, and that the foreseen golden age of the northern region will not be as positive as predicted.

Trafficking is an example of a problem that travels across borders and needs to be solved in cross-border cooperation. The border between Russia, Finland and Norway marks the biggest welfare gap in the world. Northern Norway and Finland are not the richest areas in the world, and northern Russia is not the poorest; however, in comparing the two the difference becomes striking. Working against trafficking means both working with preventing women in source countries from becoming trafficking victims, and working with men in receiving countries to stop the demand, and through this get rid of the market that makes this industry attractive for criminals.

The conference also resulted in initiation of a new network, namely the Barents Women Gender Watch (BWGW). BWGW is a networking- and cooperation project that focuses on gender structures in the Barents region and the strategies of Barents region women in confronting globalisation/transregionalisation and socio-economic change. The BWGW network aims to be a network among research, education and activism resource milieus in the Barents region and surrounding areas, with a particular view to documenting the socio-economic realities in this dynamic region.

The conference language was English with interpretation to Russian, with all the challenges this includes for an event.

## Participants

The participants were crisis centre workers, activists, researchers, politicians, social workers, bureaucrats and others. Enclosed, please find the participant list.

## Program

### November 29<sup>th</sup>:

15.30: Registration, Rica Arctic

16.30: Open house at the Nora centre

20.00: Reception at Grenselandmuseet. Welcome speech by Linda Randal, chair for the political elected board at the Nora centre, and Lise Østby, The Northern Feminist University. Performance by Josef, "Taktløs Trommeliga" and Randi Sneve Stene, Ketil Nicholaysen and Omar Pleyem.

### November 30<sup>th</sup>:

09.00: Conference opening, Kirsti Saxi, Finnmark County Council Chair, and Marit Stemland, The Northern Feminist University

09.30: Plenary, "Democratisation processes in a gender perspective"  
Keynote speaker: Carita Peltonen, Nordisk Ministerråd

10.15: Discussion and questions

10.30: Coffee break  
11.00: Workshops – parallel sessions  
13.00: Lunch  
14.30: Keynote speaker: Britt Kramvig, NORUT, “Oil, gas and development in the northern region – a gendered perspective”  
15.15: Discussion and questions  
15.30: Parallel workshop sessions, including coffee break  
16.45: Plenary summary – workshop summaries  
18.00: Voluntary activities, swimming/sledding  
20.00: Dinner

### **December 1<sup>st</sup>:**

09.00: Plenary, “Violence in close relations”  
Keynote speaker: Tove-Lill Labahå Magga, “Indigenous women and oppression in society”  
09.45: Discussion and questions  
10.00: Parallel workshop sessions, including coffee break  
12.00: Lunch  
13.00: “16 days of action”, Torch-lit march campaigning for preventing violence against women. Speech by Bjørg Irene Østrem, chairperson of the Nora centre board  
14.00: Keynote speaker: Riitta Pohjoisvirta, Oulu Mother and Child Home and Shelter  
14.45: Discussions and questions  
15.00: Keynote speaker: Lise Bjerkan, Fafo, Linda Dyrliid, HiST, “The silenced experience – dilemmas and challenges in the reintegration of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation”  
15.45: Discussions and questions  
16.00: Plenary workshop session, including coffee break  
17.30: Plenary summary – workshop summaries  
18.00: Press conference  
20.00: Dinner and cultural programme

### **December 2<sup>nd</sup>:**

09.00: Greetings from Anne Rygh Pedersen, State Secretary, Ministry of Justice  
09.10: Plenary, Trafficking and prostitution  
Keynote speaker: Mildred Hedberg, IRIS, “Trafficking in the Barents region”  
10.00: Discussion and questions  
10.15: Keynote speaker: Lubov Shtyileva, Member of Congress of women on Kola Peninsula, director Murmansk crisis centre “Shelter”; “Trafficking and prostitution in Murmansk region: Russian point of view”  
10.35: Plenary workshop session, including coffee break  
12.30: Plenary workshop summary  
13.00: Lunch  
14.00: Plenary summary and evaluation  
15.00: Conference closing

## **Keynotes**

We will here present summaries of the keynote speeches. The full texts can be obtained from The Northern Feminist University.

### ***Kirsti Saxi – Finnmark County Council***

Kirsti Saxi recently took up the position as chair of the county council of Finnmark. She opened the conference and welcomed us to Finnmark and the Barents region. She emphasised the importance of addressing the conference issues, and said that these highlight the very basics of humanity and dignity for all in the Barents region. She also mentioned the importance of people-to-people-cooperation in the Barents Cooperation. The Barents Cooperation prioritises “soft projects”, which makes it different from other regional cooperation. She said that the Barents cooperation takes gender equality seriously and she praised the participants for their work within the fields of equality, dignity and humanity.

### ***Carita Peltonen – Nordic Council of Ministers***

Carita Peltonen from the Nordic Council of Ministers informed us that the gender equality work in the ministry is now focused on gender budgeting and violence against women. She emphasised the importance of investigating how resources are distributed, and using a gender perspective in budget work.

In her opinion it is now time for men to start discussing gender equality issues. The problem of lack of equality cannot be solved by women only, men must also take action and involve themselves in changing the situation. Men must first find their own angle on gender equality before we can reach a state where women and men can cooperate towards a common goal. She mentioned the need for good male role models fighting for gender equality. Peltonen emphasised that to reach a gender-equal society, there must be a true equality between women and men in all arenas; welfare, economy, respect and identity.

### ***Britt Kramvig: “Oil, gas and development in the northern region – a gendered perspective”***

As researcher at Norut Samfunnsforskning in Tromsø, Norway, Britt Kramvig has been working in the Barents region on different research projects with focus on gender. She mentioned the need for systematic knowledge in order to be able to identify the situation for women in the Barents region. She reflected upon the unanswered questions that emerged after she finalised a research project on why women leave and men remain in the northern periphery. She went into questions around development of the North in connection with the oil and gas industry. She said that oil and gas, as a possibility for future development, construct a new language in which to tell the stories of the region, by doing so it changes how people see themselves, their identities and prosperity. She used examples from her research in Hammerfest, the development of the Snøhvit (Snow White) project and the metaphors used in connection to this. These are almost exclusively masculine and do not take into consideration that the future development should include opportunities for both men and women. She reflected on the fact that in the Norwegian context, women in Finnmark have higher than average education, while the men there have less. She encouraged knowledge institutions, local governments and regional counties to “think gender” and to find models where women are seen as a resource and can use their knowledge, education and experience to create

development; and by this creating a better future, better welfare and better democracy in the Barents region.

### ***Tove Lill Labahå Magga: “Indigenous women and oppression in society”***

Tove-Lill Labahå Magga, Norway, asked for exploration of redefining tasks and roles rather than trying to remove the gender and ethnical stereotypes from the discussions in private and public discussions, in official institutions and arenas. She emphasised that the journey towards gender and ethnical justice and justice for the indigenous people of the world is collective, community-based and inclusive. She reflected upon the consequences of racism. Even though it is recognised today that races are a social construction, and that all humanity belongs to just one group: the human race, people are subjected to racism, either in biological or cultural terms. The indigenous people of the north have faced colonialism from the nation states, and they have been forced to relate to other peoples’ institutions and their cultural practices. Institutional racism consists of the collective failure of an organisation or institution. It is systematic and not connected to a prevalence of racist persons within the organisations. She said that indigenous people in the north has been victims of this institutional racism. She also said that Saami women as a group have had fewer possibilities to remain Saami than the men. The men have been able to continue their traditional life with support from the nation state to a greater extent than women. Abuse of women is not present to a lesser or larger extent in indigenous societies than in any other context, however, indigenous women are more affected than the majority of women, since the consequences of having to leave their closest family also includes leaving their traditional way of life, and their culture. Labahå Magga argues that women’s shelters should not be public institutions and part of the public health system, they should rather be owned and run by the women themselves.

Labahå Magga stressed the need for seeing violence in a more global perspective. She called for an examination of the fundamental relationship of power and dominance operating on a world scale and awareness that racism and discrimination are barriers to equal development in the world and that globalisation can have negative impact for some.

### ***Riitta Pohjoisvirt: “Children in crisis centres”***

Riitta Pohjoisvirta from the Oulu Mother and Child Home and Shelter, Finland, focused on children who are subjected to violence, in being abused themselves or having to witness abuse of their mothers. She presented official statistics from Finland and her own experiences from Oulu Mother and Child Home and Shelter, where 1/3 of the children were victims of violence. She explored consequences of violence on the foetus and consequences of lack of care for newborn children. Abuse of babies or lack of care during the first years will have consequences for life, such as cognitive development, ability to control stress and emotions. Pohjoisvirta stressed the importance of being attentive to, and having knowledge of treatment of the babies in the shelters, creating a stable atmosphere, giving the mothers space to settle down and opportunities to take proper care of the children.

## ***Lise Bjerkan and Linda Dyrliid: “Silenced experience: Dilemmas and challenges in the reintegration of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation”***

Lise Bjerkan, Researcher, the Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies (Oslo, Norway) and Linda Dyrliid, Assistant Professor, Sør-Trøndelag University College (Trondheim, Norway), gave us a presentation of the complexity in factors that push young women into trafficking. They presented us to their fieldwork done in Serbia, Italy and Moldova in cooperation with Serbian researchers, entitled “Dilemmas and challenges in the reintegration of victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation”.

In their project they explored whether and in what ways victims’ expectations and needs are met during reintegration processes. They define trafficking according to the UN Palermo Protocol. Working within this field, they stressed the importance of having knowledge both about the structures that make women vulnerable to trafficking and the individual consequences for the women being exposed to this kind of abuse. They claim that causes like poverty are more relevant on a structural than an individual level. They presented changes in recruitment of victims of trafficking, rather than being tricked by false advertisements of jobs in the West, victims are now recruited and betrayed by people they know and trust. Having been trafficked implies a total loss of control and influence over your own life. The challenge of the rehabilitation will depend on the length of the trafficking experience and what the victim has experienced. Bjerkan and Dyrliid stressed the importance of ensuring that victims of trafficking are provided with relevant and precise information that will enable them to make qualified decisions regarding their future. They also called for increased predictability in rehabilitation and reintegration services, to enable beneficiaries to find sustainable and durable solutions. The “silenced experience” refers to the fact that victims who return to their home communities often choose to keep quiet about their negative experiences. This as a strategy for survival, and many consider it easier to go on with their normal life when their surroundings do not know about the abuse they have been through. This may lead to others following in their footsteps, since the true horror stories are seldom told.

It is important to focus on the factors that lead to trafficking, not only the consequences of it. Bjerkan and Dyrliid emphasised that if we can identify risk factors and indicate and identify risk groups, we can create alternatives that can truly prevent trafficking. It is necessary to work with the challenges the women face also before they become victims of trafficking. There is a need for more focus on the reasons that lead to trafficking, not only the consequences of it, and there is a need for greater attention on how to prevent women from becoming victims of trafficking.

## ***Anne Rygh Pedersen –Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police***

Anne Rygh Pedersen, State Secretary in the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, started by emphasising the importance of the conference, and she presented some of the Norwegian government’s views and actions regarding violence against women and trafficking. Rygh Pedersen said that the Norwegian government welcomes a frank and honest debate on violence in close relations, which has been considered a private matter for too long, and she stressed that all use of violence is prohibited under Norwegian law. The governments view is that domestic violence is unacceptable and that it must be prevented, combated and alleviated through measures to help and protect the victims and through prosecution and treatment of the perpetrators. She pointed out that when violence occurs in close relations, the

consequences are more extensive than the visible effect of the harm caused by the act of violence itself, since the persons involved have a meaningful role in each others life. She confirmed that the responsibility of coordinating the efforts to combat domestic violence lies with the Ministry of Justice and the Police, however, several institutions and ministries are involved in this work.

Rygh Pedersen also presented the Norwegian government's position regarding trafficking. She said they have a strong commitment to combat this serious crime, and that the state is responsible for protecting the human rights of all persons within its borders against all human rights violations. They have a responsibility to protect and assist victims of trafficking, to prevent women and children from being recruited to trafficking, to curtail the demand for prostitutes and to detect and prosecute traffickers. The effort to combat trafficking is a complex issue and is done in cooperation between a number of governmental and non-governmental organisations. The work is coordinated by the Ministry of Justice and the Police. She finally presented a number of measures, tools and methods used for assisting victims and combating the problem.

### ***Mildred Hedberg: "Trafficking in the Barents Region"***

Mildred Hedberg from the IRIS shelter for women in Luleå, Sweden, gave us a more detailed portrait of the people involved in trafficking, with her extensive experience on violence against women, shelters and trafficking. She described the trafficking situation today and the work done on combating this in Sweden. The work includes information campaigns aimed at adolescents in the source countries as well as awareness-raising campaigns aimed at sex buyers in receiving countries. She emphasised the importance of stopping the demand for trafficking victims through making men take a stand against buying women.

Hedberg also talked about the Swedish law of 1999 that criminalise the buyers of sex, and welcomed the positive effects this has had on combating prostitution and trafficking in Sweden.

### ***Lubov Shtyileva: "Trafficking and prostitution in Murmansk region: Russian point of view"***

Lubov Shtyileva is director of the "Shelter" crisis centre in Murmansk and member of the Congress of Women on the Kola Peninsula. She presented perspectives on trafficking and prostitution from a Russian point of view. She told us that Russia is among the major source countries for trafficking and it has been revealed that a number of criminal groups are organising this trade. The authorities are taking action and the law has been amended to cover trafficking as a criminal offence, there is also a new law on witness protection. However, the problem of trafficking has been neglected by the Russian authorities for long. The attitude has been that Russian women travel abroad voluntarily, and if they are abused there this is no longer the responsibility of Russian authorities. They have not been willing to support women's organisations working on combating trafficking.

She presented strategies employed to combat trafficking and emphasised that the actions are two fold: to remove the reasons for trafficking and to help the victims. The "Shelter" crisis centre works on preventing trafficking through information and by creating local opportunities. They produce and distribute a great amount of information material among young people, women and targeted risk groups. They also assist trafficking victims through a

hotline where they give advice. Shtyileva identified the presuppositions of trafficking as the feminisation of poverty, the high level of domestic violence and the distortion of morals, and a permissive attitude to prostitution, violence and sexism from the government. She also mentioned gender imbalance as core of the problem, and suggested criminalising sex buyers as in Sweden, as part of the solution.

## **Workshops**

The participants had to choose between the “Violence in close relations” or “Democratisation processes in the Barents region in a gender perspective” workshops. The “Trafficking and prostitution” workshop was organised as a plenary workshop in which all participants took part.

### ***Violence in close relations***

This workshop was chaired by Wenche Jonassen, researcher at the Norwegian Centre for Studies on Violence and Traumatic Stress, in three sessions. The papers in this workshop were organised by topics, the papers presented and discussed in this workshop were:

#### **Upbringing/Attitude raising**

- “How to Affect Public Opinion” by Olga Ipatova, Sortavala Crisis Centre (Karelia)
- “Violence in close relationships” Vera A. Russkih, Department N 118, Polyarnie Zori
- “The base of the healthy life style” by Ljubov V. Solomon, College №1 in Polyarnie Zori
- “Violence as a result of the psycho-social trouble” by Inna V. Ryzhkova and Tatyana Tegaleva, Social pedagogic and social work department, Murmansk Pedagogical University
- “New thinking and new perspectives in research on and work against violence: Gender stereotypes at Arkhangelsk schools” by Olga Tilman, Crisis Centre “Bridges of Mercy”, Arkhangelsk

#### **Crisis centres**

- “How to care of employees, whose work is connected to a problem of violence” by Voropaeva Ekaterina, “ The Complex centre of social service of the population "Sources", Petrozavodsk
- “Balint groups for the volunteers of women crisis centre”, by Natalia Potapova, psychologist of WCC “Bridges of mercy” Arkhangelsk
- “Experiences from working with women exposed to violence” by Tatyana A. Vedonkina – gynecologist
- “Domestic Violence: Perspectives in Combating and Prevention” by Irina Matviyenko, Coordinator of the Crisis Department, National Center for the Prevention of Violence ANNA, Moscow
- Presentation of the NCRB exchange program between crisis centers in the Barents region by Elena Haraldsson, the Nora centre

#### **Men and violence**

- “Preventive work with men” by Valeriy Khoudoyash, Archangelsk Municipal Crisis Centre for Women

- “Support for men in crisis: the example of the Altai Regional Crisis Centre for Men” by Maxim Kostenko, Altai Regional Crisis Centre for Men
- “Therapy for men, who are violent to their partners” by Nani K. Merebashvili, Crisis Center INGI, St.-Petersburg

### **Children**

- “Upbringing of children with the moral values as a way to a better future for them” by Elvira G. Belyaeva, College №1, Polyarnyie Zori
- “Children – Silent Witnesses” by Grechishkina Marina, Crisis centre for women, St.Petersburg
- “Child as a silent witness” by Elena N. Zebina, Regional hospital of Petrozavodsk city.

### ***Democratisation processes in the Barents region in a gender perspective***

This workshop was chaired by Aino Saarinen, senior researcher at Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, leader of the NCRB network, in three sessions The papers presented and discussed in this workshop were:

- “Women’s Political Representation and the Question of Democracy: Arctic Case Study” by Heidi Sinevaara-Niskanen, Lapland University, Faculty of education/ Women’s studies
- “Making space and taking positions: Women’s agency in local communities in the rural Finnish North” by Seija Keskitalo-Foley, Lapland University, Faculty of education/ Women’s studies
- “Women’s activism and Civil Society in Russia” by Natalia Kukarenko, Pomor state University, Faculty of social philosophy
- “Views on Gendered Violence and Prostitution - by Russian Women Immigrants, Russian Experts in Help Institutions and ‘Native’ Nordic Authorities and Actors” by Aino Saarinen, Helsinki University, Aleksanteri Institute

### ***Trafficking and prostitution in the Barents region***

This workshop was chaired by Mildred Hedberg, Kvinnojouren IRIS, Luleå, in two sessions. The papers presented and discussed were:

- “Mapping the situation, and project against trafficking in women in northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and north-west Russia” by Irina Enbuska, Swedish representative in the Nordic Trafficking project
- “Informational actions about trafficking among the youth and children in Murmansk region” by Maria Styileva, Shelter crisis centre, Murmansk
- “Trafficking problem in Apatity” by Svetlana Mekhedova, Apatity Crisis Centre
- “Prophylaxis of HIV infection and drug addiction among the prostitutes in Murmansk” by Fedor N. Bailuk, Murmansk City HIV Centre
- “Female Migration in Northern Europe (FEMINORE)  
- A cross-sectoral research network funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers” by Dag Stenvoll, The Rokkan centre, Norway

## **Evaluation**

The overall impression from the conference was positive, the participants were satisfied. The program may have been too tight, and there were some technical difficulties, however, the content of the plenaries, workshops and discussions were met with support. The food and accommodation was also appreciated.

## **Media coverage**

The conference was well covered in the local media. There were several articles in the newspapers “Finnmarken” and “Sør Varanger Avis”, editorials in “Nordlys” and “Fremover”, newsspots on NRK radio and TV and an article in the “Kilden” gender equality newsletter.

## **Conclusions – the way forward**

A lack of gender perspective in democratisation processes, violence in close relations and trafficking are issues that are crossing borders and are relevant in all the countries in the Barents region. The problems travel across the borders, which mean that the solutions has to do the same. This conference showed that the people working with these issues in their respective countries see the value of cooperating, and showed interest in doing this also in the future. The conference created a meeting point for researchers and practitioners within and across the three fields, and resulted in a number of fruitful discussions. Among other things, the conference resulted in establishment of the “Barents Women Gender Watch”, a network of researchers, institutions and resource persons who work within this field in the Barents Region.

It is popular to talk about the potential for development in the northern regions and to see the Barents region as being on the verge of new and positive development. We must make sure that this development also includes a gender perspective, so that the development does not only include plans and solutions designed by and for men. In order to create sustainable development in the area, it is most important to consciously take into consideration that the work and society must include and make room for women, with equal opportunities for women and men.

If the publicly outspoken wish of ending violence against women is seriously meant, we will expect targeted efforts from the authorities in the countries in the region to combat violence and trafficking. Promises in speeches are not enough, the problem must be prioritised, and targeted actions must take place. In order to create viable solutions it is recommended that we work in cross-border cooperation, both when it comes to combating trafficking and violence against women and in order to create democratic development that includes equal opportunities for both women and men.