



Hague Mothers Newsletter December 2023

Dear <<First Name>>,

We're slowly but surely winding down for the Christmas break. We finish work on 21 December and will be filled with pudding and cheer and back at the computer on Monday 8 January.

Thank you to every one of you who supported us this year. With your help we are starting to make progress in ending the injustices of the Hague Abduction Convention. Here's a round-up of the key milestones of 2023.

International recognition

We've put the Hague Mothers' campaign on the map internationally. We are working at government level, with domestic violence and women's organisations globally, and with survivor-led partners. We started with a focus on the US, UK and Australia: we are now linked up with activists and survivors in Canada, Mexico, Brazil, India, Sweden, France, Belgium, Austria, Netherlands, Portugal, Ireland, Philippines, Japan, and New Zealand.

Hague Mothers and the Special Commission meeting

Our key focus in 2023 was on the Hague Special Commission meeting and how to influence the outcomes of that event.

- Mothers contributed their experiences to create our [Mothers' Voices booklet](#) – a powerful testimony to the brutal realities of the Convention. We gave out 130 copies to delegates at the meeting. It had a major impact.
- Mothers also wrote directly to the Secretary-General and Special Bureau members. These emails and letters, along with the booklet, were really significant; the Secretary-General referenced the 'unprecedented volume' of correspondence he'd received in his opening remarks.
- In partnership with GlobalARRK and six other international charities, we created a [#ProtectHagueVictims](#) global petition which garnered almost 38,000 signatures.
- We organised an [Open Letter to the Special Bureau](#) with a request that they set up a working group committed to safeguarding mothers and children who are victims of domestic abuse and who are then caught up in Hague proceedings. Over 90 international experts signed the Open Letter which was circulated to all delegates.
- In writing the Open Letter, we benefited enormously from the advice and support of UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls Reem Alsalem. Along with UN Special Rapporteurs on Torture and Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Reem Alsalem also wrote to the Secretary-General to raise her concerns about the impact of the Convention on mothers and children who are victims of domestic abuse, and to recommend the creation of a working group to seek solutions to the problem.

These requests, with the formidable assistance of Professor Merle Weiner who attended the Special Commission meeting, and the support of a number of states, resulted in a recommendation to hold a **forum on domestic violence and the Hague Abduction Convention** (specifically in relation to Article 13b) in 2024.

The Forum ... making progress

Subsequently, Ruth and Roz have met with Secretary-General Bernasconi on two occasions to discuss the Forum. It is now confirmed that it will take place in Pretoria from 18th to 21st June 2024. The event will be open to those with lived experience of the Hague and domestic abuse, to state representatives, judges, lawyers, domestic abuse professionals, academics, and advocates for 'taking' parents and 'left-behind' parents.

Both Hague Mothers and GlobalARRK have been invited to join the Forum Steering Committee, alongside representatives from four of the states who were particularly supportive of the proposal: Australia, South Africa, Philippines, and Brazil. The group will also include domestic violence experts; the Secretary-General has asked us for advice in that regard.

There's a long way to go but we have certainly taken the first steps.

Restructuring

Like Topsy, we just grew and grew! Now that we've had time to take stock, we realise that we need a 'flatter' structure that will enable all of our volunteers to participate fully, and ensure sustainability. Our new structure will ensure that the experience and expertise of Hague mothers is at the heart of the campaign; expand our International Steering Group; give greater autonomy to country-based groups; and strengthen our global partnerships. Chair of FiLiA trustees and VAWG lead Sally Jackson will oversee the campaign and make sure that we stay true to FiLiA's feminist values, and we hope to expand our admin team so that our plate-juggling becomes more efficient. We hope to have everything in place, and the website updated, by the end of January 2024.

If you'd like to contribute in any way, please let us know. Ruth can be contacted at Hague@FiLiA.org.uk; Michelle is at AdminSupport@FiLiA.org.uk.

Et cetera...

There hasn't been a lot of time for other initiatives but, earlier this week, we submitted a Hague briefing to the UK's report stage and third reading of the Victims' and Prisoners' Bill: "We believe that the Bill will be strengthened by the inclusion of protection for a cohort of victims of crime who have minimal rights under the current law, namely, adult and child victims of domestic abuse and other risks of harm who are involved in or are the subject of proceedings under the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction."

Wishing you all a peaceful festive season.

Ruth, Michelle, Sally & FiLiA

#SolidarityWithHagueMothers #HagueMothers



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