



## Hague Mothers Newsletter June 2022

Dear <<First Name>> ,

**Welcome** to the first of our Hague Mothers Project Newsletters – tracking our journey over the lifetime of the campaign. We hope you’ll stay with us through the ups and downs, delights and disappointments, restarts and resets. We’re in this for the long haul.

For those of you who’ve just discovered us, Hague Mothers was initiated by the feminist organisation [FiLiA](#) as a long-term, international legacy project. FiLiA’s mission is to build sisterhood & solidarity, amplify the voices of women, and defend women’s human rights.

**The overarching aim of the project is to end the injustices created by *The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction*, specifically for mothers and children who are fleeing abusive relationships.**

**So far, so amazing...**

**Our project [website](#)** launched at the end of April. In the first month we had 698 visits from 32 countries. The top three were the UK, USA and Australia, but we had viewers from across the world. The Hague Convention impacts on mothers and children in every jurisdiction that has signed up to it – over 100 at the time of writing. Our latest blog [Being Hagued: How Weaponising the Hague Convention Harms Women](#) looks at the reality of the Convention for mothers fleeing domestic violence and, importantly, suggests some possible solutions.

**Our plan** is to begin by building an [international feminist network](#) of lawyers, academics, domestic violence and child safeguarding, professionals, activists, influencers, policy-makers, and Hague mothers. Our initial focus is on the UK, USA and Australia.

Even at this early stage, we've gathered enough passion, experience and expertise to power a small city. Some of the women who are working with us have been involved for many years in the fight for justice, some are new to the campaign. Some have joined the project because of their personal experiences, others through knowing or hearing about mothers whose lives have been torn apart by the Convention.

**Brief bios** of our [project contributors](#) are now up on our website; more women are joining us by the day. We'll feature some of them in each issue of the Newsletter. Here's the first, inspirational clutch...

**Adrienne Barnett (UK)**

Adrienne is an indefatigable fighter for women's rights, particularly for of those who have suffered domestic violence and abuse. She's also warm, generous and persistent! Currently a Senior Lecturer in Law at Brunel University London, she specialised for 25 years in Family Law, primarily representing parents and children in serious care cases and in private law cases involving allegations of domestic abuse. She's a member of the *Advisory Group of Rights of Women* and of the *Women's Aid's Expert Advisory Group* to the Child First campaign. The UK Ministry of Justice commissioned her to undertake a literature review to support their inquiry into risks of harm and the family courts (published June 2020), and was an 'expert witness' in the 2021 Channel 4 Dispatches Programme 'Torn Apart – Family Courts Uncovered'. She is currently collaborating in an international research project on domestic abuse and parental alienation allegations in the family courts.

**Ali Morris (UK)** is a feminist activist and campaigner who has worked in the Violence Against Women & Girls sector for over 25 years. She is a qualified social worker and was the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Coordinator for Swansea Council for 12 years. Working alongside her is a total joy... once Ali has decided that something needs doing, she is unstoppable. During her tenure at the Council, she persuaded them to adopt a zero-tolerance policy for strip clubs in the area, and obtained the first-ever funding for a local project supporting women in prostitution. Ali is FiLiA's VAW lead in Wales, she's the director of Inspire, a VAWDASV Consultancy and Training business, and is involved in a number of women's organisations on

a voluntary basis.

**Kim Fawcett (UK)**

A Hague mother herself, Kim set aside her previous career and went back to university, initially to complete a law degree, and then to undertake a PhD, in order to seek justice for others mothers caught up in the Convention. She is now a Teaching Fellow in Criminal Law at Durham University, a member of the Durham Gender and Law Research Centre, and is about to be examined for her doctorate: *'When women abduct: do we need a defence for women who abduct their children internationally in order to flee domestic abuse?'* Kim was previously a trustee and a Parent Support Volunteer at GlobalARRK, assisting victims of the Hague, most of whom were also domestic violence survivors. She has also worked as a Family Support Worker in Low Newton Women and Young Offenders Prison.

**Sudha Shetty (USA)** was one of the first people we contacted when we set up the Hague Mothers' project. An inspirational force of nature, she is the founder and director of The Hague Domestic Violence Project at UC Berkeley which has done so much to change the judicial landscape in the USA. From a standing start, Sudha began working with judges, lawyers and academics to create judicial bench-guides and training, focusing on the significance of domestic violence in Hague petitions brought against mothers, and the impact of domestic violence on children who witness it.

**Gina Masterton (Australia)** is a former solicitor and barrister who became aware of the Hague Convention when her own sister had a case brought against her. The desperation of that situation brought her to activism and thence back to academia, and a PhD which used a feminist lens to look at the impact of the Convention on abused women and children. Now a Post-Doctoral Researcher with the Queensland University of Technology Centre for Justice, Gina remains determined to right the injustices of the Hague. Her current research includes investigating how domestic and family violence affects indigenous women and children, and, as an indigenous woman, she brings a new perspective to our understanding of the potential cultural dispossession caused by Hague return orders.

**Rosa Saladino (Australia)**

Rosa is a critical friend to the Hague Mothers' project, and a hugely appreciated advocate for mothers facing a Hague petition in Australia. She has extensive experience in Family Law and has been the manager of the secretariat of the Family Law Council, which advises the Australian government on Family Law matters. Rosa has been working with international conventions concerning children for most of her career, and now focuses on

the Hague Abduction Convention through the specialist Hague Convention Legal Practice which she founded in 2017.

She previously worked in the Australian Central Authority and the Central Authority for England and Wales, for the NSW Central Authority and with ISS Australia.

Already the Hague Mothers' project group – 26 of us at the time of writing – is a formidable force! Their expertise and experience is phenomenal; their commitment to ending the injustices created by the treaty is inspirational. They are individually and collectively glorious – the international sisterhood in action! We'll spotlight a further clutch of brilliance in the next Newsletter.

### **What else?**

Well, we've been thinking about how best to raise awareness of the Hague Convention...

### **Co-designing our UK strategy**

FiLiA, and the extraordinary annual FiLiA conference, is run by volunteers. If you ask FiLiA CEO Lisa-Marie Taylor how on earth they manage to do all they do, she will reply: 'you just put a group of women together in a room, and magic happens'. We tested her theory earlier in the month when 14 of us got together over zoom to begin to get to know each other, to share our knowledge, skills and plentiful attributes (passion, dedication, determination and persistence featured strongly), and to co-design our initial UK awareness-raising strategy. We'll be putting it in to operation next month: Ali Morris is co-ordinating the professional focus; Adrienne Barnett and Ruth Lamont will lead on the legal side.

### **Talking to the European Network of Migrant Women**

The [ENoMW](#) is a fabulous organisation with close links to FiLiA. Led by migrant women, they are feminist, secular and non-partisan, advocating for 'the rights, freedoms and dignity' of migrant women and girls in Europe. Ruth and Adrienne were invited to talk about the project, particularly in the context of migrant women who, of course, are at particular risk of having a Hague petition brought against them. The conversation is [here](#).

### **Hague Mothers at the [FiLiA Conference](#)**

As part of our awareness-raising, we're also starting to plan for the Hague Mothers' session at this year's conference in Cardiff. Between 1200 and 1500 feminists will be there, from all corners of the globe – the warmth, vitality, and sense of solidarity is incomparable. Hope you can be there! There will be a Hague Mothers' panel session in the main hall with contributions from a

range of international experts alongside stories from mothers; the launch of the USA survivor-led Hague Collective; and, on Monday 24<sup>th</sup>, an action-focused project meeting led by our International Steering Group.

***We intend to build an unstoppable international movement for change. Please share this newsletter and information about the Hague Mothers' FiLiA legacy project with others. And if you'd like to contribute your expertise, experience, and passion for justice, please get in touch with Ruth at [hague@FiLiA.org.uk](mailto:hague@FiLiA.org.uk)***

That's all for this first issue. Lots of exciting news to come in July's Newsletter – about research, education, our proposed archive of mothers' stories, support groups being created in New Zealand and Australia, and a brilliant political campaign created by a Hague mother in Australia that has gained cross-party support. Plus a US Supreme Court decision that definitely moves things in the right direction. Unmissable!



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