



Hague Mothers Newsletter November 2023

Dear <<First Name>>,

Apologies for the absence of an October newsletter, we were so busy doing things, there was no time to write about it.

The big news is that we went to The Hague!

On 10th October delegates from all parts of the world arrived at The Hague for the Eighth Meeting of the Special Commission on the practical operation of the Hague (HCCH) Child Abduction Convention. [We were there too.](#)

We gave out over 130 copies of our [mothers' voices booklet](#) to the delegates as they arrived. They had a significant impact, not surprisingly given the power of the words, and the beauty of the design. Our thanks to all of the mothers who contributed, to Lou Godbold for her belief in the project and her superb editing skills, and to Liz Price for ensuring that the design did justice to the content. It is dedicated to loving mothers across the world whose lives have been decimated by the Hague Abduction Convention.



Along with Roz Osbourne of [GlobalARRK](#), we handed a [#ProtectHagueVictims](#) petition with almost 38,000 signatures to Secretary General Bernasconi. Receiving the petition, the Secretary General said that he did so ‘*as an expression of respect and empathy for the mothers and families who have endured the pain and trauma of domestic violence*’. He also committed ‘*to listen, empathise, and understand the gravity*’ of their experiences.



Our short meeting with him also gave us an opportunity to discuss our [Open Letter](#) proposal for a working group to be set up to ensure that the Convention works to safeguard victims of domestic abuse who flee for safety with their children. The Secretary General was enthusiastic. He suggested that the way forward might be through a less formal forum, one that encouraged dialogue and built sustainable relationships. In the event, this was the proposal that made it through to the Special Commission Conclusions and Recommendations. Our sincere thanks to those states who supported its inclusion, and to the Philippines who have offered to host it.

Here's the recommendation:

In light of the discussions on the issue of domestic violence and the operation of Article 13(1)(b), and further to correspondence received by the Secretary General from advocates for victims of domestic violence prior to the start of the SC, the SC supported the proposal of the Secretary General to hold a forum that would allow for discussions amongst organisations representing parents and children, and those applying the Convention. The importance of ensuring a balanced representation of all interested parties was emphasised. The agenda of the forum, which would focus on the issue of domestic violence in the context of Article 13(1)(b), would be prepared by

a representative Steering Committee. The forum may also inform possible further work of the HCCH on this matter. Subject to available resources, the forum would ideally take place in the course of 2024. The SC invited States that are interested in contributing to the organisation and funding of such a forum to inform the PB accordingly. The SC thanked the Philippines for their willingness to assess hosting the forum in Manila, with the financial support of other interested States and observers.

Roz and Ruth met with Secretary General Bernasconi last week to discuss the 'forum for open dialogue' and consider how to make best use of this opportunity for change. It was an interesting, informative and very positive meeting. We have every hope of a good outcome. Watch this space for updates!

The Narkis Golan Initiative: inspiring news from the US

[Sanctuary for Families](#) in New York has been chosen by the US Federal Office on Violence Against Women to receive funding to create a Hague-specific initiative within their Legal Department. Their Pro Bono Director, Nicole Fidler (a member of our international strategy group) will lead *The Narkis Golan Initiative: Hague Convention and International Abduction Assistance for Survivors of Domestic Violence*.

The Initiative will focus on increasing access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence involved in international parental abduction cases. Specifically, the Initiative will: train and educate judges, attorneys, survivors, and advocates across the country; establish a nationwide network of trained pro bono attorneys willing to take parental abduction cases on behalf of survivors; provide assistance, advice, and mentorship to domestic violence advocates and lawyers who work on these cases pro bono; conduct client screenings and provide advice and/or find clients pro bono representation with private attorneys; and advocate with relevant government agencies to improve implementation of child abduction laws for survivors.

Huge congratulations to Nicole and Sanctuary. This initiative will make a real difference.

The next vital step for the Initiative is to appoint a Senior Staff Attorney to help Nicole realise the Initiative's goals. If you know of any qualified candidates (or if you are one) here's the [information](#) about the job.

What's next for Hague Mothers?

We've been in existence since March 2022. Initially there were three of us, all in the UK. Now there are over 100 women working together from across the world, and, through FiLiA, we are connected to hundreds more, all contributing on a voluntary basis. So it's time to take stock, to make sure that we can sustain our growth and impact.

The first change is that the Hague Mothers project now sits within FiLiA's violence against women and girls workstream. The second, associated change, is that FiLiA trustee and VAWG lead Sally Jackson will formally oversee the project. We will benefit enormously from Sally's extensive experience in the VAWG field, her dedication to improving the lives of women across the world, and her empathy, foresight and clarity. We are looking forward very much to working more closely with her to build on all we've achieved to date.

Specifically, we need a structure that makes better use of the extraordinary range of expertise and experience that we have at our disposal, and one that lives up to the FiLiA vision of building sisterhood and solidarity, amplifying the voices of women (particularly those – like Hague mothers – who are purposefully silenced), and defending women's human rights. Plus we need to strengthen our relationships with sister organisations globally. And we need to sort out funding.

With Sally's help, Michelle and Ruth are going to focus on getting those things right over the next few months, aiming to have everything in place before our second birthday in March 2024. Please let us know if you'd like to contribute in any way. Ruth can be contacted at Hague@FiLiA.org.uk; Michelle is at AdminSupport@FiLiA.org.uk.

On the website...

[In a nutshell](#)

Hague expert and activist (and Aus HM team member) Gina Masterton was recently asked about the Convention. She has given us permission to publish her eloquent and comprehensive reply.

[Why children are being returned to abusive fathers overseas](#)

A powerful report from Australian journalist Stephanie Wood.

[No exception. How the Hague Convention fails women fleeing domestic violence](#)

An overview of the injustices of the Hague Convention by trauma expert (and

US team member) Louise Godbold for Culturico.

Reforming the Hague

The problematic impact of the Hague Convention for victims of domestic abuse, and some potential solutions. The author, Alicia Flint, recently graduated with First Class honours from Durham University where she studied Law. This Policy Brief was produced as part of her Law, Gender and Society module coursework.

WAVE statement on the interconnection between violence against women and violence against children in child custody cases

A statement from [WAVE](#) (Women Against Violence Europe) regarding gender-bias in European courts and the lack of understanding of the impact of domestic violence on victims.

FiLiA 2023 / FiLiA 2025

The other big news, given that Hague Mothers is a FiLiA project, was that the FiLiA Conference took place in Glasgow. It's the largest (and best) feminist conference in Europe, possibly in the world. Over 1,000 women from 35 countries gathered together for three days of activism, courage, education, laughing, learning, crying, hugging, singing and disco-dancing. Impossible to put into words just how energising and inspiring it is to be there. And it's entirely unfunded, self-supporting, and organised by volunteers.

[Find out more and get tickets for the next one in 2025](#)



Thanks to all of you for your support.

In solidarity with Hague mothers across the world.

Ruth, Michelle & FiLiA

#SolidarityWithHagueMothers #HagueMothers



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