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SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF EUROPE

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR ADVOCACY TEAM!

Much of the content of our previous *Advocacy News* focused on lobbying at the international level – at the UN in Geneva and New York and at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. We know that these places and institutions may appear distant – both geographically and in terms of their connection to the women and girls we serve in our communities. This is why in this issue we have strived to put the spotlight back on the absolutely crucial advocacy work Soroptimists do in their communities. We have also sought to illustrate, in as concrete a way as possible, the tight connection that exists between the advocacy work Soroptimists do in their towns and their countries, on the one hand, and the advocacy work we can do at the international level, on then other. It is only by making our voices heard in our own communities that we can become a truly global voice for women!

Elena Savu, *Vice President for Advocacy*
Maria-Elisabetta de Franciscis, *President Elect & Head of Programme & Advocacy*

This month we talk about…

GOING FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL - AND BACK

SOROPTIMIST—A *LOCAL* VOICE FOR WOMEN?

To grow a truly global voice for women and girls and be effective advocates at all levels, **Soroptimists need to make their voices heard in their respective communities first**. Advocacy at the local level reflects a **natural bottom-up approach** because it is Soroptimists who are the first-hand witnesses and collectors of information relevant to women and girls. **Advocating for actions that improve the lives of women and girls will always be rooted in local realities before being communicated to national and international organisations**.



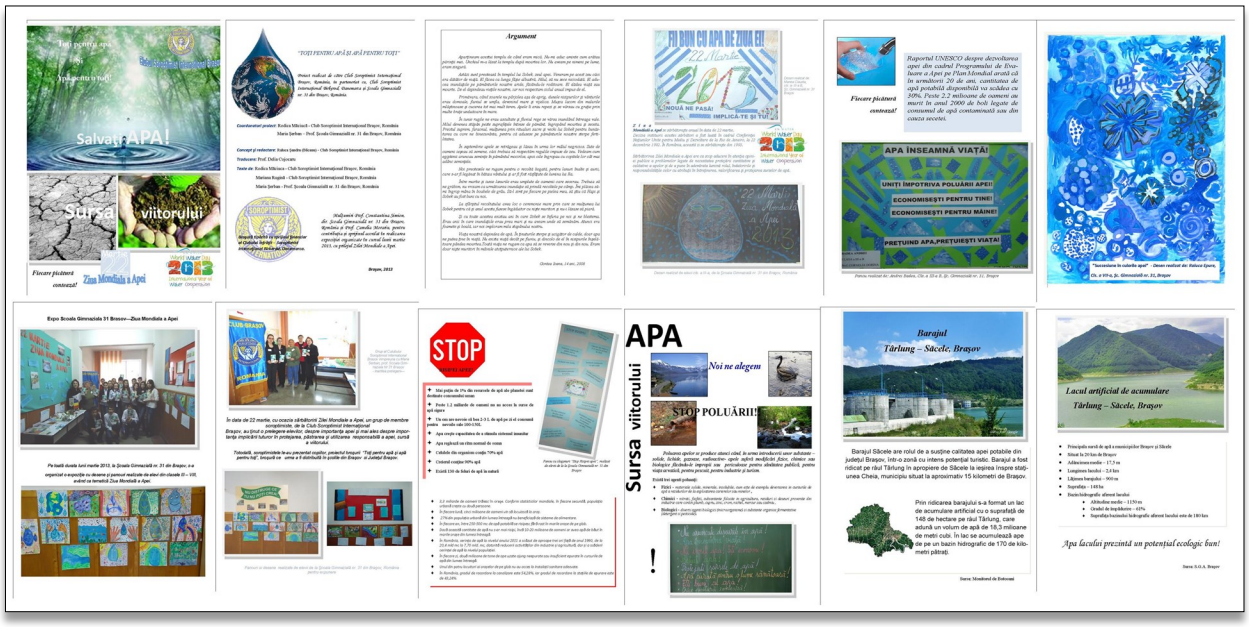
So, how can we be effective advocates in our own communities? Let us look at some examples from my own country, Romania. The simplest way is to **disseminate information** on the project you are implementing and **make yourself visible**. For example, SI Brasov called a **big press conference** with all the city's media to publicise their project "Alex 10 years"- in which SI Brasov has been committed in supporting financially the education of a parentless 10 years school children for a period of 11 years.

Similarly, **spreading the message further on social networking sites** like *Facebook* and *Twitter* made SI Bucharest's 'mini-project' dedicated to the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

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widely known in the community. The post collected a lot of 'likes' and comments of support and, even more importantly, gathered an impressive number of participants in the action of distributing bracelets and flyers in the street.

Another example can be SI Brasov's project "All for water and water for all" for which they produced **a leaflet** on the importance of water for environmental sustainability **that was distributed for several months in the city's schools, companies, institutions and hotels and reached a truly large audience**.



But media is not the only way to plead for your cause! Effective advocates **influence and educate community members**. Advocacy may involve **community outreach to inform people about Soroptimist goals and efforts**, and may even **actively engage the public in supporting a project.**

The specific members of the community you decide to address will vary depending on your objectives and could range from policymakers to young people. For example, SI Slatina's 4-year project on preventing infant mortality due to contaminated drinking water from local fountains eventually **convinced the local rural authorities** to access European funds to solve the problem of sewage and safe drinking water. The project, which benefited 400 young mothers and about 500 babies from rural areas, also **engaged local doctors in educating young mothers and spreading the Soroptimist message**.

The Romanian Union's anti-trafficking project is also a good example in this regard. All Romanian Clubs **trained young people to be 'messengers' in raising public awareness** on this critical issue in Romania. The 'messengers'

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delivered lectures to other young people and distributed anti-trafficking materials in public spaces like shopping malls or underground stations.

But **often these kinds of initiatives cannot be done alone**. In order to strengthen your local advocacy voice, **it is important to build partnerships and coalitions**. The power of advocacy is given by the number of community members and organisations who actively support your



action. For instance, SI Brasov's event "Fashion and Art for Children" **created dialogue and a joint collaboration between Soroptimists and 12 other local organisations from both the state and private sector**!

These are, of course, only a few examples. Local advocacy can take many other forms: **writing emails, letters, petitions or op-eds, drafting recommendations, calling or meeting with the local media, elected officials and authorities**. Remember that **advocacy is the process of putting a problem on the working agenda and drawing the community's attention to it so that it can be solved**. An advocate is "one who pleads the cause of another…". Isn't this exactly what we as dedicated Soroptimists have always been doing through our projects that help improve the lives of women and girls?

Until recently, we always referred to this as "programme". But **the time has come for us to strike a balance between *programme* and *advocacy*, in other words, between what we actually do and the message we wish to transmit**. This means making a conscious effort to promote public awareness of the important contributions we all, as Soroptimists and professional women, make to our own communities.

There are no recipes – local communities across the European Federation have particular characteristics, organisational structures and cultures. However, the basics of effective advocacy are commonly shared by our members because Soroptimists care and wish to make a change for the better in the lives of women and girls. **Strategic advocacy can make Soroptimist voices not only heard but also listened to**. And listening implies **a response from the community and the ability to influence its agenda, to seek greater accountability from decision-makers and to bring about real change**!

Elena Savu, SIE Vice President for Advocacy

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35,000 SOROPTIMISTS ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS!

Human rights and children

Discrimination and violence do not stop at the school doors. That was the motivation for **Soroptimists from Regensburg in Germany** to run the project "Attention, Advocacy and Advancement of Human Rights in Regensburg Schools". Many schools and pupils participated. They organised and completed projects related to human rights — some even received awards for their projects that included painting and photo competitions on human rights!



Gender equality

In **Portugal, Soroptimists from Porto Invicta**, implemented a project called "Living in Gender Equality". The project aimed to raise awareness about gender equality among school-age children. Its objective was to disseminate some of the themes outlined in Portugal's *Fourth National Plan for Equality, Gender, Citizenship and Non-Discrimination* through the production of videos. The project took place between 2012 and 2014. It saw the successful conclusion of one hundred



sessions to sensitise students in secondary schools and high schools, and thirty awareness sessions for Parent-Teacher Associations. In addition, DVDs were distributed to schools, universities and various local governmental agencies ensuring the sustainability of the project beyond its projected timeframe.

Stopping the cycle of violence

Lithuanian Soroptimists from Silute organised an advocacy project to acquaint the public with issues of domestic violence and with different support mechanisms available to those who experience such violence. Soroptimists introduced the *No-Violence* campaign to raise awareness about domestic violence among a large audience of women. A movie about domestic violence called *Take My Eyes* was also presented. Finally, the audience also benefited from the experience and expertise of speakers from the police, women's employment centres, and social services. The event received a considerable amount of media coverage.

Restoring women's place in society

Malagasy Soroptimists from the Club of Tolagnaro organised a conference to raise awareness on the role of women in their society. The conference saw many questions and discussions between women and institutions, local authorities, local women's associations, and others. The objective of this conference was to make women aware that much progress has been made from the standpoint of both national and international laws to recognise gender equality. It also aimed to help women understand that they can be active agents of change: that they can change attitudes by daring to take responsibility and by advocating for other women.

Improving women's lives

Poor nutrition, inadequate hygiene, and drug dependence problems among women and girls living in poverty were the issues **Soroptimists from Anittepe / Ankara in Turkey** wanted to tackle. To achieve this goal, they organised several training sessions where professors from different universities and other experts spoke. Their awareness campaign sought to give students at a textile school the necessary tools for escaping poverty. So far, 1500 students have been trained. Soroptimists from the Club of Anittepe / Ankara hope to continue this project in years to come!

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HOW ADVOCATING AT HOME CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO WOMEN EVERYWHERE

In this edition of Advocacy News, we are looking at ***the importance of local-level advocacy and how it is connected to advocacy at the international level.*** *In this text, Bettina Hahne, the Soroptimist International of Europe Representative at the Council of Europe, looks at* ***how actions Soroptimists can take at the local and national levels can contribute to the implementation of an international treaty*** *of concern to women. She takes the example of the Istanbul Convention to give some practical suggestions for what Soroptimists can do locally to advocate for the full success of this important international convention.*

Some background to the *Istanbul Convention*

All 47 member states of the Council of Europe (CoE) have ratified the *Human Rights Convention*. Its ratification is a prerequisite for becoming a member of the CoE – only natural, as human rights are what the CoE is all about. The *Istanbul Convention* emanates from it. It gives precise answers to what human rights mean when it comes to gender-based violence. And it also defines measures to be taken by countries to **prevent** violence against women, to **protect** its victims and to **prosecute** perpetrators.

It is important to know that countries *other* than the Council of Europe member states are invited to join the *Istanbul Convention* as well, as it promotes fundamental human rights.

What can we, as Soroptimists, do?

Above all, **make it known** that you and your fellow 35,000 Soroptimists adhere to the Convention! The more voices speak out about it, the less it can be ignored.

Here are some **concrete ideas** for what you can do:

Write to your local politicians, to your regional representative, to your head of government (their addresses can be found online). Depending on their commitment so far, **ask them to sign or to ratify** the Convention. If your country has already ratified it, congratulations! In that case, **ask for its rapid implementation** and point to areas in your town, region or country where you see the need to act.

Don't be disheartened if you don't get a quick answer. Your representatives receive lots of letters, but the more letters like yours they receive, the more the *Istanbul Convention* will be present in their minds as decision–makers, the more they will feel obliged to act in its spirit and to give it priority.

On another level, **speak about the *Istanbul Convention***, **learn about it online** or through **the CoE's brochure on the Convention** which you can also print out.

Ask for material that you can distribute, **give a public talk about it**, or **ask your representative for gender issues to give a talk, or the director of social affairs or for example a university professor specialising in gender studies**. If you invite a politician to talk about the *Istanbul Convention* at one of your monthly meetings (open it up to the public!), you will both make them conscious of it and spread knowledge about it.

And, please, give us your feedback to programme(at)soroptimisteurope.org as well as to your Union, of course!

Bettina Hahne, SIE Representative at CoE

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ADVOCATING AT THE *INTERNATIONAL* LEVEL TO HELP WOMEN IN *YOUR* COMMUNITY

Appealing to the UN on behalf of women in your community is much easier than it seems. This illustrated 8-step process shows you how *you* can help women in your town or country have their concerns heard by different UN bodies dealing with women's rights — such as the CEDAW Committee or the Human Rights Council. Remember, local and international advocacy are tightly connected! It's time to get involved!

1





Let's say, for the sake of example, that you are a member of a Soroptimist International Club in Moldova.

2



And let's say you become aware of a particular violation of women's rights going on in your country—a violation that merits the attention of your government and the international community. You can do something about it!

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3



It's quite easy: send a letter to SIEHQ at programme(at) soroptimisteurope.org to tell Headquarters about the issue and to share any initial evidence you might have about it. Evidence is key for making our case strong at the UN!

4

Together with you and your Club/Union , SIEHQ will then draft a statement or a letter to the relevant UN body: the Human Rights Council or the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), for instance.



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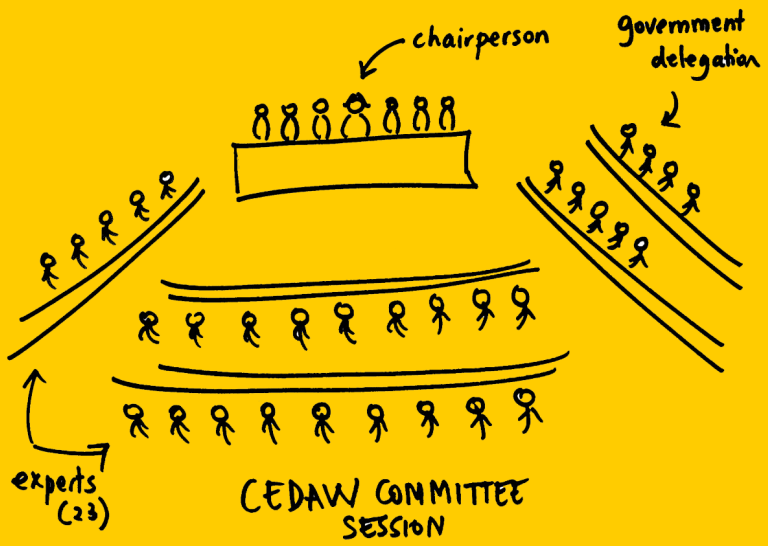
5

The statement can be submitted in written form or delivered orally. If we decide to give an oral statement, we will then go to the UN in Geneva, when the relevant UN body is in session, and read our statement during the time allotted to NGOs!



6

This, for example, is what a session of the CEDAW Committee looks like:



The Committee will listen to our statement and ask follow-up questions if necessary.

7

The CEDAW Committee will then take into account the information submitted by SIE and other civil society organisations and produce a report on the country in question (in our example, it's Moldova).



8



The report will then be given to the government of Moldova which will have to address the issues highlighted in the report, including those submitted by NGOs such as Soroptimist!

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WHAT'S ON AT...

UNESCO

SOROTPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL ADVOCATING AT UNESCO

We have **make our voice heard** and **re-affirmed our involvement at the international level**! As part of the general consultative status that we hold at the United Nations' ECOSOC, our **Representatives at UNESCO in Paris**, **Marie Christine Gries, Evelyne Para**, and **Rina Dupriet** are actively contributing to the Working Group of the NGO Liaison Committee and participating in the development of draft NGO recommendations on the theme

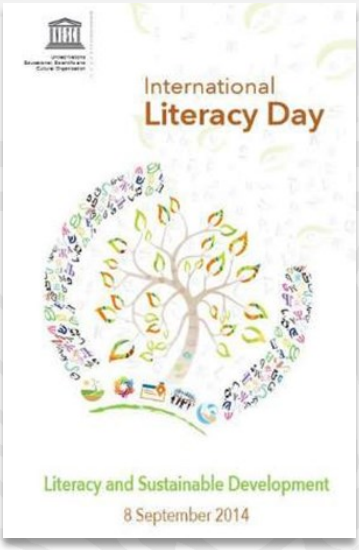


of *"Literacy: A stepping stone for an equitable and sustainable society."* On the occasion of the International **Literacy Day on September 8th 2014**, Soroptimist International was invited to share its views on **literacy** as one of the key elements needed to promote **sustainable development, and achieve economic growth, social development and environmental integration**.

Anne Simon, our **SIE Executive Director** on behalf of Soroptimist International took the opportunity to insist on the fact that we are an organization of women who strive to bring about the very best for other women under a simple guiding principle: **"Educate to Lead"**. She reiterated that almost all Soroptimist projects have an educational component, enabling women and children to **pursue lifelong quality learning**.

Anne **called on governments to**:

- At minimum, fulfil existing obligations in international treaties and agreements relating to equal access to education.
- In the lead up to the MDG deadline next year, prioritise quality education for women and children throughout their lifespan as a necessary foundation for the achievement of all development goals – and make sure access to quality education for women and girls is upheld beyond 2015.
- Pledge to work towards policies and programmes with a life-course approach to education, recognising and understanding that access to learning is a human right at all ages, and that women and children have different learning needs at different times in their lives



To read Anne Simon's full speech at UNESCO please click here.

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WHAT'S ON AT…

THE UNITED NATIONS

27TH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The Human Rights Council is holding its 27th regular session at the United Nations in Geneva from September 8th to the 26th.



The Human Rights Council (HRC) is the supreme organ of the intergovernmental human rights system within the United Nations. It addresses human rights violations and makes recommendations on them. The HRC discusses human rights issues on a thematic basis. In this session, issues on the table that will be of particular interest to Soroptimists will include the "Annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective" and the "Panel on accelerating global efforts to end violence against children".

This HRC session is also the first for the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein from Jordan, who is taking over from the extremely well regarded previous High Commissioner, Navi Pillay from South Africa.

The full session of the HRC can be followed online through the UN's live streaming service at http://www.un.org/webcast/unhrc/ .

For more information on panel discussions, please click here. To access the programme click here.

UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE & BEIJING+20

This November, European and North American governments will be meeting at the United Nations in Geneva to review progress made on the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, a cornerstone document for women's rights, whose 20th anniversary is approaching next year.

In the few days prior to this governmental "UN Economic Commission for Europe Regional Review", a big NGO conference will also take place at the UN in Geneva. This is to ensure civil society, and women's organisations in particular, have their voices heard too – just as they did at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 where the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* was elaborated, and just as they did each time it was reviewed in the years since.

A joint delegation representing SIE, SIGBI and SI, will be taking part in this crucial event. Soroptimist International of Europe has already submitted a statement to this event's committee, which focuses on the prevention and elimination of violence against women.



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SO MUCH JARGON!
WHAT IS…?

"BEIJING+20"?

Literally, "Beijing+20" means "The 20th anniversary of the 4th World Conference on Women which took place in Beijing in 1995".

At this historic conference, UN Member States adopted a key document for the advancement of equality and women's rights around the world: *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)*. This document laid out "a decisive agenda for advancing women's rights and empowerment". It gave concrete recommendations for lifting women out of poverty, promoting the education and training of women, improving women's health, fighting violence against women, safeguarding women's rights in armed conflict, and much much else.

Every five years since then, member states of the UN have met to review how far they've got with implementing the recommendations of the *BPfA*. NGOs play a crucial role in this review process as well: with an eye and an ear to the reality of women's lives in their communities, NGOs can supply information regarding progress and setbacks connected to the *BPfA* that governments simply don't have access to.

With the year 2015 marking the 20th anniversary of the *BPfA*, governments and civil society alike are working hard to identify where progress has been made, where gaps and barriers remain, and how the post-2015 global development agenda might best integrate the promotion of gender equality. Which brings us to…

…"THE POST-2015 AGENDA"?

The year 2015 also marks the expiration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which have been the basis for the entire global development agenda for the last fifteen years.

The MDGs – there are eight in total – do not focus specifically on women. Instead they define a number of priorities for governments, institutions, NGOs, and people working in all areas of development. Among the MDGs, there are two that focus on women: MDG #3 – *Promote gender equality and empower women,* and MDG #5 – *Improve maternal health*. Women's organisations have long criticised the overall lack of emphasis on women and gender equality in the MDGs.

Now that the MDG deadline, 2015, is approaching fast, there is a lot of activity among civil society actors to define what the *new* development goals will be.

There are a couple of important things to know. First, these new development goals will likely be called the "SDGs" (Sustainable Development Goals) instead of MDGs. Second, women's organisations are advocating heavily to have the concept of gender equality integrated into *all* future development goals (a concept called "gender mainstreaming"). There is also a substantial amount of lobbying going on to create a development goal dedicated to the elimination of violence against women (called a "standalone goal").

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ISSUES WORTH ADVOCATING FOR!

ISTANBUL CONVENTION UPDATE

The *Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and girls and domestic violence* came into force on **Friday, 1 August 2014**!

As described on page 5 by Bettina Hahne, this Convention requires states that have ratified it to take specific measures to fight against all forms of violence against women and to implement legally binding standards for the prevention of violence, the protection of victims, and the punishment of offenders. In that sense, the entry into force of the *Istanbul Convention* is expected to fill a huge gap in the protection of women's rights in Europe.

Since our special edition of *Advocacy News* that focused entirely on the *Istanbul Convention*, three more countries have ratified it – **Sweden, France,** and **Malta** – and two more have signed it – **Georgia** and **Romania**! This means that, to date, 22 member states of the Council of Europe have signed and 14 states have ratified. Soroptimists applaud all of these signatures and ratifications and encourage others European states to follow their example!

Also, an international conference, jointly organised by the Council of Europe, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Italian Chamber of Deputies, is being held on September 19th this year in Rome. The conference will celebrate the coming into force of the Convention. It will highlight the holistic approach the *Istanbul Convention* takes towards the elimination of violence against women and encourage member states and other countries that participated in the drafting of the Convention to sign and ratify it.

The Council of Europe has also produced a video on the importance of the *Istanbul Convention*. We encourage you to share it widely!

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE EU

The European Women's Lobby, the largest coalition of women's organisations in the European Union and one that Soroptimist International of Europe is a member of, is asking: *Is a European Union where less than 15% of the European Commission are women "the European Union that we want"?*

The EWL, which ran a two-year campaign for equal representation of women and men in all European institutions – the 50/50 campaign – is duly concerned that some of the progress made towards gender equality looks likely to be reversed. "Women represent more than half of the European population, and yet continue to be under-represented in decision making at all levels," the EWL wrote in an open letter to the newly designated President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, in July.

The EWL is also calling for a European Commissioner for women's rights and gender equality.

We can't afford to see women's voices so dismally represented in the decision making ranks of the EU! Spread the word to stop this trend from continuing!

A related petition can be signed here: http://womenforeuropeancommission.wesign.it/en

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EVENTS OF INTEREST

SI CONVENTION—SAVE THE DATE!

The preparations for next year's SI Convention are well under way! The programme is currently being finalised and will be shared on the SIE website, as well as on the Convention website, in the weeks to come. We therefore invite you to mark these important dates in your calendar: 9-12 July 2015! The Convention will be taking place in the breath-taking and historically unique city of Istanbul in Turkey. We are hoping to see many of you there!



CSW 59 IN NEW YORK

Last year, some of you expressed interest in joining the Soroptimist International of Europe delegation to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations in New York. This coming March, SIE will have a delegation at CSW 59 and we are hoping to arrange a couple of accreditations for interested members as well. The 59th session of CSW will take place between March 9th and 20th. Please keep in mind that the number of accreditations per NGO is strictly limited and that SIE will *not* be in the position to cover any costs associated with your participation. If you are interested in joining the SIE delegation, please contact us at programme@soroptimisteurope.org. For more information about the event, visit the CSW 59 website (which is regularly updated).

IMPORTANT DATES

Sept 21	International Day of Peace
Oct 5	World Teachers' Day
Oct 6	World Habitat Day
Oct 11	International Day of the Girl Child

HAVE COMMENTS?

This is YOUR newsletter! If you have a comment, document, link, or anything else that you would like us to communicate in an upcoming edition of the newsletter, please share it with us! Feel free to send your news to programme@soroptimisteurope.org.

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