



8 March 2016 – ‘Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality’

34,000 Soroptimists observe International Women’s Day

With an eye to accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations and UN Women have declared ‘Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality’ as the official theme for International Women's Day 2016 on 8th March. Soroptimist International of Europe actively supports this call for women and girls to enjoy gender equality and equal rights by 2030. After 80 global leaders convened at the United Nations in September 2015 to commit to ending discrimination against women by 2030, the 34,000 women in the 61 countries behind Soroptimist International of Europe are now monitoring the concrete measures and actions taken by national and local governments to close the gender gap.

At the same time, Soroptimists use the model: **Educate, Empower, Enable** to effect change in their respective countries.

- **Access to Education for Women and Girls**

- High-quality, safe, affordable and lifelong education is crucial to empowering women and girls as individual and as members of their communities. The strategic objective of the 2015-2017 biennium theme, **Soroptimists Invest in Education**, is to enable women to achieve equality and freedom from social, economic and cultural constraints by promoting education. Thousands of euros have been spent at various levels of Soroptimist International of Europe to award scholarships and grants and to finance mentoring programmes. Last year the SIE Scholarship Fund alone offered scholarships to 17 women for a total of nearly €110,000. This year special focus will be placed on encouraging women and girls to pursue education and training in the fields of science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM).

- **Empowering Women and Girls**

- Women are still underrepresented in positions of power and influence, at community, national and international levels. Through hands-on projects, Soroptimists empower women and girls around the world. For instance, the Soroptimist Leadership Academy for Young Women, organised by SI Club Struga and supported by SI Turkey, and mentoring programmes in Germany and Italy train women to be leaders and decision-makers. Through a collaboration between SI Club Oslo and SI Club Pretoria, the Mapula embroidery project helped needy women in Winterveld to generate an income by providing useful skills. Thanks to a project sponsored by SI Bamako Espoir, women in Mali have become economically self-sufficient by working their own vegetable gardens. These are just a few examples of how Soroptimists empower women.

- **Enabling Women and Girls**

Soroptimists enable women and girls to overcome the effects of various forms of violence, of war and of poverty. For example, SI Lillie Métropole raised awareness of a helpline for women victims or witnesses of assault in France. SI Uzhgorod funded the renovation of a shelter for displaced women and children in the Ukraine. Soroptimists from the Netherlands and Turkey are financing the acquisition of prefabricated schools in Turkey, thus allowing Syrian refugees to pursue an education. SI Italy initiated a countrywide project to equip special rooms in courthouses for questioning children, which spares them the anguish of appearing in court.



Political commitment to tearing down barriers for women is necessary to achieve parity by 2030. Nations must increase investment in combatting inequality, enact anti-discriminatory legislation and address social norms that perpetuate discrimination and violence against women. Most member states are committed to implementing the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Now there is a new drive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. While Soroptimists welcome this political will, we believe and demonstrate that action is better!

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