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PROGRAMME NEWS



A MESSAGE FROM YOUR PROGRAMME TEAM!

As we put the final touches to this edition of the *Programme News* dedicated to one of our five focus areas and President Ulla's biennium theme *Let's Go Green*, we learnt of an unrelated but hugely important development in the area of the protection of women's fundamental human rights. Just a few days ago, Andorra became the 10th country to ratify the Council of Europe's *Istanbul Convention (Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence)* — and thus, finally!, triggered the entering into force of the Convention! Our CoE Representatives, Bettina Hahne and Françoise Ferey, as well as many other Soroptimists who engaged in awareness raising and lobbying activities played an undeniably important role in the promotion of the *Istanbul Convention.* On behalf of all women we want to take this opportunity to say thank you! We encourage all of you to continue your fantastic work so that we can help create a true wave of signatures and ratifications in the weeks and months ahead! But first, let's talk about environmental sustainability. Happy reading to you all!

Maria-Elisabetta de Franciscis – President Elect and head 'Programme & Advocacy'
Emine Erdem – Assistant Programme Director

This month: ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

MOTHER EARTH DAY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Earlier this month, we celebrated **International Mother Earth Day**. What a beautiful idea the UN had when they established a day to pause and reflect on our Mother Earth and to celebrate it! Every year on **April 22nd**, over **a billion people in 190 countries take action** for our Earth.

Earth Day 2014 focused on "**Green cities**". As citizens of the world, as women and as Soroptimists, we were encouraged to **celebrate the generosity of our planet** who through its ecosystems provides its inhabitants with life and sustenance in a motherly manner. We were invited to **pause and reflect upon all the harmful actions we take against it** and for which we are now suffering climate change, extreme weather, droughts, and floods.

As members of Soroptimist International of Europe **we must, we can, and indeed we do much more than just celebrate International Mother Earth Day**. We have been involved in **reducing water waste** and in **bringing safe water** where there was none. We have worked hard towards **improvements in sanitation** in many places around the world. We made the connection between **water and food**. And today, **President Ulla's biennium theme**, in perfect continuity with her predecessors, encourages us **to advocate and to act in defence of a sustainable environment**.

There is so much we can say and do in order to prevent the very worst of scenarios. We can advocate and encourage the development **of new technologies** — especially biotechnologies — to help fight hunger and to produce more food and less waste. We can encourage a **return to local farming**. We can create **vegetables gardens on city terraces and in home gardens**. We can join the Food and Agriculture Organisation in its **rural farming campaign**. We can promote the EU campaign to **Stop Food Waste**. We can persevere in our longstanding campaigns of **planting trees.** We can educate the new generations to **search for alternative and renewable energy**.

We owe it to future generations but we owe it also to our own organisational past. In fact, how can we **forget the first ever Soroptimist Club project**? With the **Save the Redwoods project**, it was the **Oakland Club** and **our Founder Violet Richardson-Ward** who set the path for "our" love of the environment and "our" vocation for advocacy. In 1922, Soroptimists lobbied the legislature, took on powerful lumber companies, gained public support for their project, and succeeded in ensuring a major portion of the redwoods is set aside in a protected reserve. This reserve still stands today. **So, what are we doing today? Let us know about your projects!**

- Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis

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AN INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT ULLA

Ana Barfield, SIE Programme & Advocacy Officer, sat down with President Ulla to discuss this year's Mother Earth Day and her views on environmental sustainability!



SIEHQ: What does April 22nd, International Mother Earth Day, mean to you?

President Ulla: Similarly to March 8th when together with all Soroptimists and women around the world we celebrate International Women's Day, International Mother Earth Day means a lot to me! It's a day to focus on how our planet and its environment are doing. I always try to make an active contribution on this day. Last year I helped clean up the green areas in my neighbourhood. I also take environmental sustainability issues up with my family, colleagues, and friends.

At the level of international policymaking, gender and environmental sustainability are usually considered separately. Do you see some change in this regard?

Women form a disproportionately large share of the poor in countries all over the world. Women in rural areas in developing countries are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood, because of their responsibility to secure water, food, and energy for cooking and heating. The effects of climate change, including drought, uncertain rainfall, and deforestation, make it harder for women to secure these resources.

The latest report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated that, "Throughout the 21st century, climate change impacts are projected to slow down economic growth, make poverty reduction more difficult, further erode food security, and prolong existing and create new poverty traps, the latter particularly in urban areas and emerging hot spots of hunger." This suggests to me that gender is beginning to be more in focus because of the realisation that climate change affects women/men/children differently. We must make politicians aware of this!

What can Soroptimists do to make the impact of environmental degradation on women and girls better known?

Soroptimists can be "A Global voice for women" on environmental issues locally, nationally, and internationally. The 2013-2015 biennium theme "Let's Go Green" asks all Soroptimist Clubs and members to make sustainability and environmental protection not only a priority for their projects but also their personal responsibility.

Our representatives at international organisations including the UN express our viewpoints loud and clear, but it is equally important for us to be active in the local community and at national level! I encourage all Soroptimists in the Federation to show leadership and to take every opportunity to work together for a healthy environment!

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How would you like to see Soroptimist activity in the area of environmental sustainability develop during your biennium and beyond?

It would of course be good to see more projects in the area of environmental sustainability. PFRs tell us that many effective and creative projects have already been carried out in this regard in terms of cleaning water, planting trees and seeds, making gardens, producing materials in a cleaner way, building toilets for girls, promoting solar energy. Small or big projects are all welcome! I would like to recommend more joint projects between Clubs, Unions, across countries, and through partnerships. Joint projects are always stronger and fulfill other Soroptimist values like friendship, tolerance, and mutual respect.

And finally, how do *you* make sure to "talk green, work green, and act green" on a daily basis?

Lately I have especially made an effort to "stop wasting food" which is a major concern in developed countries. We buy and eat less meat. If we have leftovers in the fridge we try to make an interesting dish out of them. When I buy clothes, I check where they were produced. We are also talking about buying an electric car! It is a challenge to live by "Let's Go Green – working for a healthy environment" but the first step is always the hardest!



What YOU can do!

A few suggestions from President Ulla on what you and your Club can do to work towards a more sustainable planet for women and for all!

WASTE
- ◊ Work with supermarkets to reduce food waste
- ◊ Promote farmers' markets
- ◊ Promote buying local products

RECYCLING
- ◊ Advocate for reliable collection systems
- ◊ Recycle paper, plastic, glass, aluminium, food, electronics
- ◊ Contribute to and promote second-hand shops

PUBLIC TRANSPORT
- ◊ Encourage use of public transport
- ◊ Encourage use of bicycles
- ◊ Lobby for electric vehicle charging stations

PUBLIC SPACES
- ◊ Fund park and playground restorations
- ◊ Introduce rooftop gardens
- ◊ Lobby to turn existing structures into living/office/retail space

ENERGY
- ◊ Campaign for solar power
- ◊ Campaign for energy efficient lights

SANITATION
- ◊ Install toilets/latrines in schools and rural communities
- ◊ Lobby for toilets which convert waste into fertiliser/fuel

WATER
- ◊ Campaign for drinking water in public spaces
- ◊ Campaign against bottled water
- ◊ Fundraise for water collecting and the installation of wells and pumps

FORESTS
- ◊ Work on reforestation campaigns

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35,000 SOROPTIMISTS WORKING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY!

Some highlights of recent projects conducted by Soroptimists across Europe and Africa!

Joint efforts to reduce pollution

To protect the environment and reduce pollution, **Soroptimists from SI Porvoo-Borgå in Finland** organised a seminar with speakers from external organisations to which they invited local charities and municipal representatives. They sought to raise awareness about environmental protection, and highlighted short and long term risks linked to pollution. They called for all to act!

Water and agriculture

To help eliminate poverty and food shortages, **SI Nahariya in Israel** visited an agricultural school where they held a lecture for women and girls on organic production and healthy food cultivation. The importance of water was highlighted to describe sustainable environmental practices. The project aimed to empower women by rendering them more self-sufficient and giving them the possibility to start small projects at home.



Women and sanitation

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a big problem in rural Kenya. Households lack drinking water even though villages receive large quantities of rainfall all year round. Households headed by grandmothers and widows who care for vulnerable children are especially affected. **SI Kisumu in Kenya in partnership with SI Denmark** started a project to improve access to drinking water and sanitation by installing rain water harvesting tanks in vulnerable households and giving talks to villagers on reducing waterborne diseases, especially those associated with poor sanitation.



Awareness of food shortages

Soroptimists from Targoviste in Romania, wanted to draw women's attention to the lack of food in certain poor regions of the world, including in their country where some families still do not have enough to eat. They planted beans in small plastic cups, at home and at work. On March 8th, they planted the grown beans in a public square in the centre of the town and also offered plastic cups with the plants to women in the street. This action was a great success and even got local media coverage!



Environmental sustainability and children

To celebrate World Environment Day, members of **SI La Rochelle in France** decided to introduce that subject to children in four schools. The objective was to make children in underserved areas aware of environmental problems, water, and nutrition. They purchased garden equipment for the schools and a rain water collector for children and teachers so that they can adopt a sustainable practices.

Stop wasting food

Developed economies are increasingly facing the problem of food waste: food bought in a rush or food packages that are too large for small households to consume often go to waste. Soroptimists in **Bielefeld in Germany** decided to tackle this problem. They published a book with recipes for delicious meals all made out of common leftovers! They advocate using all food instead of throwing it away or composting it when it's still edible!

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GENERAL PROGRAMME NEWS

IN MEMORY OF ELIANE LAGASSE

To help orphaned girls in the Affamé area of Benin, **SI Cotonou Doyen** undertook the **construction of a dormitory in the Orphanage of Affamé**. The primary objective of this project was to give the girls the opportunity to develop themselves in a healthy and warm environment where they feel safe, and to allow them to project themselves positively in the future. The dormitory **can accommodate 20 orphans** in good conditions. Work has been done to renovate the sanitary facilities.



This dormitory was inaugurated on **February 20th, 2014**, to mark the **25th Anniversary of Soroptimist International of Benin**. The dormitory is **named after SIE Past President Dr Eliane Lagasse** who the Club had the pleasure to receive while the construction work was ongoing. Eliane was an enthusiastic supporter of projects in Benin and **Beninese Soroptimists wanted to pay tribute to this "Grand Dame"!**

10TH PEACE MARATHON IN RWANDA

The SIE Board and the President of the Union of Rwanda invite you to join the **Peace Marathon in Kigali on May 18th**! This year, as the world marks 20 years of the genocide in Rwanda, the Peace Marathon celebrates its **10th anniversary.** Initiated by Soroptimists, and supported by them to this day, this important peacebuilding event "in the land of a thousand hills" will be accompanied by an **exhibition of the activities of the Soroptimist Clubs of Rwanda and the San Marco Soroptimist Centre** that you had the chance to read about in a previous edition of the *Programme News*. For more information, go to: http://www.kigalimarathon.org/.

OHRID LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

You recently received information about a **ten-day Leadership Academy for young women** in the **beautiful lakeside town of Ohrid in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** organised by the **Turkish Union and the Single Club of Struga (FYROM).** The Leadership Academy seeks to teach young women how to become leaders who contribute to the improvement of the lives of women and girls within their communities through a "holistic, empowering training for the heart, mind, body and soul". Soroptimists can support the project by **applying to teach** or by **participating** in it! The Academy is taking place between **July 16th and 25th**. Learn more about it here: http://www.soroptimistmacedonia.com/p/about-camp.html.

This is a **FINAL REMINDER** – the application **deadline is May 1st**!



UNION OF PORTUGAL ANNIVERSARY

Alexandra Costa, Programme Director of the Union of Portugal, is extending an invitation to all to the **anniversary of the Union of Portugal** that will be taking place on **May 18th**. The anniversary will be the occasion to give the **Teresa Rosmaninho Award**, created in honour of a member of the Club of Porto who did remarkable work in the area of **violence against women and children** and whose legacy the Club is still carrying on today. The 2014 award will be given to the women who lead the **Caldas da Rainha Association** that helps women with cancer recover through art.

WITH YOUR EYES ONLY!

Soroptimist International of Europe is organising a photo competition – and YOU **are invited to participate**! Here is what you need to know:

The competition is open to **members only**. Each participant can submit up to **2 photos for each topic**. The topics are: **1. Women and Girls for a Healthy Environment** and **2. Women and Girls Stop Wasting**. The photos should be between **1MB and 8MB in size**. Each photo should indicate: **a title, the date and place the photo was taken, the first and last name of the participant, their email address, their phone number, the SI Club they belong to, and what inspired them to take the photo.** All photos will be displayed at the **Governors' Meeting in Copenhagen in July 2014**. A **jury chaired by SIE President Elect Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis** will choose the winners who will be awarded at the Governors' Meeting. Please send your photos to programme@soroptimisteurope.org by **June 15, 2014** at the latest!

Important! Please make sure you have the consent of all people in the photos to publish their image. All photos will become the property of SIE which will have the right to publish them.

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN FEDERATION!

Soroptimists across Africa are one big step closer to forming a **Soroptimist International of Africa**! **This March, 156 Soroptimists from 27 different African countries**, as well as **representatives of SIE, SIGBI, and SI met in Pretoria in South Africa** to discuss the creation of an African Federation, a process that was initiated several years ago and started truly taking shape in 2012 in Nairobi.

The **big challenge** now is to **meet the requirement of 2,000 members across Africa** in order to form the Federation. **Around 300 more members are needed!** You too can help! "I appeal to all Soroptimists within SIE that **if you have women colleagues or friends etc. in Africa**, **please tell them about the organisation** and please refer them to the nearest club," asks **President Ulla**. For more, please go to: http://www.siafrica.org/.

TRAINING SEMINAR IN GENEVA

Things are almost set for the **Training Seminar for Programme Directors** taking place in **Geneva** between **May 23rd and 25th**!

The entire Programme & Advocacy Team is delighted by the response this Seminar has received and is greatly looking forward to welcoming all 35 participants in Geneva soon.

If you are a Single Club Programme Director and you didn't receive an invitation this year, don't worry! Because of limited space, this time we were only able to invite PDs from countries that have a minimum of three Single Clubs. **Invitations are on a rotational basis** so we will look forward to welcoming a group of PDs from different countries to the Training Seminar next year!



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COUNTRY FOCUS: MADAGASCAR!

UNION OF MADAGASCAR

***Founding Club**: Antananarivo Doyen – 1972*
***Youngest Club**: Tolagnaro/Fort Dauphin – 2012*
***Union founded**: 1990* ***Clubs**: 13* ***Members:** 227*

Did you know that there are about 150,000 species in Madagascar that exist nowhere else in the world and that the country itself is considered a "natural sanctuary" for its extraordinary biodeiversity? Conversely, did you know that about 80% of Madagascar's forests are simply gone, most of them having been destroyed due to slash-and-burn agricultural practices (called "tavy"), widespread use of wood for heating and cooking, and illegal tree felling?

Tragic in its own right, the destruction of the environment is intimately linked with the quality of people's lives: health, nutrition, economic standing, education, and cultural identity all suffer when the environment suffers. Especially since Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world.

It is therefore not surprising that Malagasy Soroptimists have for years been working so hard to alleviate the effects of environmental degradation on the local population! In the words of **Fara Ratsimanohatra**, who is in charge of environmental projects within the **Union of Madagascar**, "Our projects have an impact on the lives of Malagasy women in terms of their health, their income, their education, and their children's awareness of healthy nutrition!"

Here we highlight a few projects that exemplify the commitment of Malagasy Soroptimists to this cause. We encourage you to use their work for inspiration!

Earlier this year, the **Clubs of Antananarivo Doyen**, **Tanamasoandro**, and **Antananarivo Mandrosoa** joined together to address the problems of forest destruction and waste recycling by introducing a biogas station in a school. The biogas station uses energy from recycled waste instead of charcoal and therefore has a smaller ecological footprint. It also reduces the school's expenditures on energy and ensures garbage that is normally scattered around the school is collected and put to good use! This project was in part inspired by another impressive initiative from 2012 in which the **Club of Antananarivo Mandrosoa**, in association with ADES (Association for the Development of Solar Energy), provided low-cost solar cookers to women living in rural areas – both in order to alleviate deforestation and raise awareness about it.

Also this year, in an effort to fight the ravages of deforestation, the **Club of Antananarivo Doyen** purchased seedlings to plant 1,000 young trees. Most impressively, the Club first managed to acquire the land on which to plant the trees: it made a request for the acquisition of land designated for reforestation with the local administration and managed to obtain a land lease for 3 hectares for a duration of 99 years! Now that is true long-term thinking!



Moreover, in true Soroptimist spirit, Malagasy Soroptimists have imbued their environmental projects with an educational component. Members of the **Club of Antananarivo Mandrosoa**, for instance, started an initiative to plant fruit trees in three different schools. Their two-fold goal: to inform children about the importance of preserving the environment and to improve their fruit intake! They are also planning a follow-up project where public schools will compete in a "Greenest School" contest!



The same club also ran a project focused on waste management whose goal was to raise awareness in the capital city on the harmful effects of plastic waste on the environment. A programme involving two villages, Ambohijanahary and Antalamohitra, and 200 school-age children was launched. Together with local Soroptimists, they collected plastic waste – two garbage trucks full! The project was so successful that the Club reports the following: "We intend to extend this project all around Antananarivo, the capital, and to distribute posters and documentation translated into Malagasy language to be shown in offices of the representatives of villages as well as to schools."

We are sure that you agree with us that this is very impressive work – especially since all these projects date from just the last few months! The work done by the Union of Madagascar underscores the importance of environmental awareness and of working concretely towards protecting the environment – even if it means getting your hands dirty from time to time!

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GENDER MAINSTREAMING & ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Today, the need to create a **comprehensive global environmental policy** is urgent yet it somehow also remains dubious. On the one hand, what we design for the future determines how we behave in the present. On the other hand, we create the future on the basis of today's projections which, unfortunately, often ignore the prospects of an actual and imminent environmental catastrophe. As implied in the "**Green Cities**" theme chosen by the **UN for Earth Day 2014**, all civic movements, no matter their area of specialisation, should always prioritise sustainability and the need for greening communities worldwide by mobilising the urban millions. Our cities and the agrarian systems that support them have to evolve. **"Going green" is no longer only a choice but an imperative.**

The **Fourth World Conference on Women that took place in Beijing in 1995** put forward the necessity of **gender mainstreaming** in all policies and programmes in order to address gender inequality. **Gender mainstreaming** is a way of **using a gender perspective to assess the implications of public policies for women and men separately** – in order to approach social problems from a pluralistic point of view which takes gender diversity into account. Inequality between the sexes requires us to adopt **a holistic perspective in order to implement the right kind of decisions in all areas of life**, ranging from politics and work to violence and environmental policies.

The most obvious **challenge for women's organisations** in this sense is to **encourage governments to increase the number of women in public decision-making**. **Environmental policymaking** in particular offers a unique opportunity to **highlight the importance of women's leadership** in an area that concerns the totality of communities worldwide. As empowered activists, women can make an immediate and results-driven difference to the preservation of our natural heritage – the most important value shared by all people.

The current fragility of the world's ecosystems forces us to **rethink the entire gendered division of labour** in the **management and control of natural resources**, especially considering the role of rural women in producing food and collecting water. **Food and water scarcity and increased levels of poverty** are the main threats of global climate change. It is therefore urgent that women become part of the decision-making process. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates **that if women had the same access as men to natural and social resources**, the agricultural output of developing countries would rise by 4%. Yet, the **limitations women face in accessing credit, capital, and education** complicate their chances of leadership in environmental policymaking. The only way out of this impasse seems to be to **promote women's leadership** and to **adopt** a **holistic practice of gender mainstreaming** in all issues of social concern, the environmental crisis being the most significant and exigent of them all.

- Emine Erdem

IMPORTANT DATES

May 1	International Labour Day
May 5	International Midwives Day
May 9	Europe Day
May 12	International Nurses Day
May 15	International Day of Families
May 22	Int'l Day for Biological Diversity
May 23	Int'l Day to End Obstetric Fistula

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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