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PROGRAMME NEWS

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR PROGRAMME TEAM!



The Programme Team is delighted to announce that the **2015 Programme & Advocacy Training for Programme Directors will be taking place between April 16th and 18th, 2015, in Lisbon, Portugal!** Focusing mainly on practical programme-related questions and tools, the Seminar will be a unique opportunity to build on the solid foundations that were set in last year's Seminar in Geneva. More detailed information will be coming next week, including eligibility for participation and practical information. We are very excited about this second 'edition' of the Programme & Advocacy Seminar and look forward to a constructive weekend with you in Lisbon!

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

This month we talk about... HEALTH

REDUCING MATERNAL AND NEWBORN MORTALITY: EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO TAKE ACTION

As an organisation focused on women's empowerment, we are faced with **an incredible challenge on the issue of maternal and neonatal deaths**. Globally, **around 300,000 maternal and 3.3 million infant deaths** (2 million of which on the very first day) **occur from preventable causes**. To make the tragedy apparent, this amounts to almost 18 giant jumbo jets full of women and children crashing each day. **Virtually 99% of these tragic deaths occur in low/middle income countries**. Half of all mothers and newborns don't receive any form of healthcare service during and immediately after birth in these countries. The picture is devastating.

However, both sides of the issue have been separately designated among **UN Millennium Development Goals (4 & 5).** As a result, **since 1990, child and maternal deaths have actually decreased by around 50%.** This achievement proves that there are **strategies for fast-track progress**. The first week of life is the riskiest, and postnatal care programmes are essential at this critical period. That's why instead of waiting for eventual cross-sectoral development to come about in terms of population dynamics, GDP increase, etc., **communities should be urgently empowered with universal access to healthcare services**.

Soroptimist International's recent "Birthing in the Pacific" project, the theme of Past President Alice Wells' President's Appeals, was a great example of what we can do as Soroptimists. This programme involved education and training for clinicians, community health doctors and village birth attendants in addition to the purchase of essential materials like pregnancy wheels and birth education kits. The list of possible projects is endless, from improving service delivery and healthcare workforce quality to developing systems of financing and healthcare governance. Our organisation's other programme goals like developing access to universal education and improving the environment are already health-enhancing in the long-run. Nevertheless, **what is required on this most urgent matter is to develop *pragmatic solutions* with a short-term results-oriented approach – which comes naturally to us, a project-driven service organisation**.

Emine Erdem
SIE Assistant Programme Director

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PROGRAMME NEWS

35,000 SOROPTIMISTS WORKING FOR WOMEN & GIRLS' HEALTH!

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

Free of charge health checks for kids

The latest statistics show that 120,000 children in Tunisia, most of whom are girls, missed class in the 2013-14 school year. Partly this is because many families can't pay for their children's healthcare. The **Soroptimist Club of Tunis Ariana in Tunisia** therefore organised medical checkups for students of primary school age, completely free of charge. The checkups included eye care, dental care, and ear, nose & throat care. The action was welcomed by families and the many children who benefited from this project.



Shortages in medical supplies

Through a collective action, **Soroptimists from the Union of Greece** addressed the problem of shortages in medical supplies by collecting and donating 16 boxes of medicines to the NGO of the Holy Archdiocese of Athens and to the Medical Association of Athens. The event was widely covered on TV and received much publicity in the Greek media. Soroptimists in Greece received a warm letter of thanks from the Holy Archdiocese of Athens.



Breast cancer in the spotlight



The Soroptimist Club of De Meierij in the Netherlands organised a lecture for women and girls about breast cancer. Two oncologists informed a wide audience of women on the latest developments in breast cancer research, treatment and screening. The aim of this initiative was to improve general knowledge about breast cancer, promote a screening programme organised by the Dutch government, and raise awareness about the Pink Ribbon organisation and their support for breast cancer research.



Water, food, salt

In order to reduce the risk of diseases associated with high sodium intake such as renal disease, stroke or heart failure, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a maximum daily intake of 5g of salt. During the World Salt Awareness Week which took place between 11-17 March 2013, the **Soroptimist International Union of Italy** launched a campaign entitled "Salt to Taste". The focus was the reduction of salt intake: a 3-week plan to re-sensitize taste buds and change bad eating habits with very little effort. Soroptimist International of Italy promoted the diffusion of a leaflet and of a video with some suggestions for checking/reducing salt intake and savouring food.

A VERY SPECIAL HEALTH PROJECT IN TOGO: EDUCATION AND EBOLA

The Soroptimist Club of Lomé Aurore in Togo ran a project that tackled both access to education and the fight against Ebola. They provided school supplies to young students of the Literacy Centre of Kodjoviakopé in Lomé and held a discussion about Ebola haemorrhagic fever. The donation was valued at around 300,000 FCFA (around 450 EUR). It consisted of notebooks, books, pens, chalk boxes and geometric instruments. This action was intended to support students during the school year and to raise awareness about Ebola at a moment when it is raging in West Africa, with around 7,400 deaths recorded to date (according to the World Health Organization). The session was run by social workers and a school nurse acting as an "awareness" team to educate the community about Ebola prevention and treatment.

The President of SI Lomé Aurore Pierrette Ayivi, said that *"Education is the real spearhead of our organisation and that means that awareness about the Ebola virus has to start from an early age."*

BRAVO to Togolese Soroptimists for this inspiring action!







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PROGRAMMES NEWS

HUMAN RIGHTS DON'T STOP AT 60!

Ageing is a life-long process, which begins before we are born and continues throughout life. Women have longer life expectancies than men, but this is closely related to income and social status.

Women often experience a lifetime of discrimination, including a lack of security, protection, access to resources, access to education and access to healthcare. **This often culminates in a multitude of challenges that women have to face in retirement and in old age.** In many cases all over the world **discrimination against older persons persists**.

Older persons are not a homogenous group, and the challenges they face in the protection or enjoyment of their human rights vary greatly. While some continue to lead active lives as part of their community, many others face homelessness, lack of adequate care or isolation, frequent causes of depression and dementia.

The UN is increasingly drawing attention to the situation of older men and women. In particular, they are focusing on issues of: **poverty and inadequate living conditions; age -related discrimination; violence and abuse; and lack of special measures.**

This is why I believe that SIE – as a global voice for women – should **call immediate attention to the growing population of older women and denounce the tendency for women beyond reproductive age to be invisible**, not just from policies and programmes, but from society as a whole. We should underline **a life-course approach of educating, empowering, and enabling opportunities for women at all ages,** including the specific needs of older women.

Here are some specifc things we can do:

- Take action around **June 15th, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day**
- **Raise awareness about discrimination** faced by older women
- **Join forces with other organisations** working on this cause
- **Help society recognise and support the unique role many older women play as caregivers** for their families, for chronically ill family members and friends and for their voluntary work on all levels
- **Support programmes that provide services for older women**, including health care, social care, and continuing education
- **Support inter-generational exchange**, support living history projects
- We should also continue to **lobby our governments to:**
  - Ratify, implement without reservations, and monitor all international treaties and agreements relating to older women, in particular the *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing*, and take into consideration CEDAW's General Recommendation 27 on *Women and Ageing*
  - Enforce legislation which eliminates all forms of violence against older women
  - Adequately fund services aimed at reducing isolation and lack of social support for older women
  - Sensitise and train authorities on age and gender-related issues that affect older women
- **Help give older women a voice!**

Christine Peer, SIE Programme Director

COUNTRY FOCUS: TURKEY!

There are **40** SI clubs in **Turkey**.
Oldest Club: **SI Istanbul** Youngest Club: **SI Konya**
Union founded in: **1953**
Number of members: **999**
Website: **www.soroptimistturkiye.org**

Women's health covers all health issues in a woman's lifetime, from birth to death. **In our country, Turkey, women's health problems mean:** under age marriage, early pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, female cancers, health problems due to aging, cigarettes and drug addiction, mental health, chronic diseases, nutrition and obesity, emergency care, difficulties with access to healthcare, infant and mother deaths, health problems due to gender inequality, violence against women, sexual harassment, assault, honour killings...

The Union of Turkey's current approach to women's health services consists of a comprehensive study that takes into account all factors affecting women in all age groups. During the Soroptimist year 2013-2014, the members of the Turkish Union reached **approximately 20,000 women through women's health projects!** You can find these projects in SIE's PFR database.

Here we would like to share with you our flagship projects in the area of Health.

One of these projects is ***Don't be afraid! Touch! Fight for your life and the people you love.*** This project was done **by 5 Soroptimist Clubs in Izmir to raise awareness of breast cancer**. The project consisted in a radiologist, who is also a Soroptimist, giving a presentation about breast cancer to 500 women and 100-150 girls aged 11. Women at risk were identified and were advised to have full medical examinations. Brochures **with information about breast cancer** and about Soroptimist Clubs and were distributed.

The Club of Uludağ recently also ran the project *The World of Butterfly*, in Bursa. Counseling was given by club members on a voluntary basis. Topics covered included women's rights, violence against women, communication, body language, pregnancy, genetic diseases, eye health, healthy nutrition. In total 1,280 women aged between 19 and 56, all of whom are textile factory workers, participated. A dietitian also gave free counseling to 30 women. You can follow this project on its Facebook and Twitter pages.

The Club of Marmara also ran the project *A healthy diet for a healthy life.* Both misinformation and a lack of information on healthy eating are common problems among disadvantaged groups. The Club of Marmara therefore took action to raise **awareness about a healthy diet for children and adults**. Members organised seminars for 78 women and young girls about fighting obesity and healthy nutrition.

Finally, **the Club of Izmir is running an ongoing project called *Children, mothers, and Soroptimists hand in hand for better health***. This project aims to **provide children who are struggling with leukemia and their mothers with better psychological care** and also with a better time in hospital through social activities. Club members look after the children for a few hours and play with them in order to give their mothers some free time for themselves.

Nur Velidedeoğlu Kavuncu, Union of Turkey PD
Muammer Durak, Union of Turkey APD
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GENERAL PROGRAMME NEWS

FEBRUARY 28TH FINAL REMINDER!

One last reminder that **February 28th is an important deadline for several competitions that Soroptimist International of Europe is running** and that will be awarded at the Governors' Meeting in Lisbon in May or at the Soroptimist International Convention in Istanbul in July!

Best Practice Awards 2015 – recognises the best projects of the previous year run by SIE Unions and Clubs

Photo Competition 2015 – recognises your artistic talents on particular themes

Peace Prize 2015 – awards remarkable women who have contributed to peacebuilding within their countries or at the international level

You can find all the necessary information about these competitions in the January edition of *Advocacy News* which you can download from this page on the SIE website.

We are looking forward to receiving your submissions – **all are encouraged to participate!**

Any questions? Just write to us at programme@soroptimisteurope.org.

YOUR PFR SUBMISSIONS

Some members have raised the following question about project reporting: **Do we now need to submit our projects reports (PFRs) through both the SI system and the new SIE one? Absolutely not!** The new SIE project reporting system is there to make your life easier, not more complicated.

Therefore please note: you do not need to submit your reports twice! **All reports submitted are synchronised between the SI and SIE systems.** If you submit a project report through the SI system it will, within a few days, also automatically appear in the SIE PFR database and on the SIE interactive map. The import/export system is already in place and works well.

If you have any other questions or doubts about the new PFR system that you can access through the SIE website, don't hesitate to let us know!

ICELANDIC SOROPTIMIST WEEK 2015

The Club of Hafnarfjordur and Gardabaer belonging to the Union of Iceland is this year once again organising an Icelandic Soroptimist Week 2015!

Taking place **between 27 June and 5 July**, the week is a fabulous opportunity to explore Iceland together with local Soroptimist sisters.

Started in 1989 and organised 13 times by the Club of Hafnarfjordur and Gardabaer, the week has consistently met with great success and appreciation from participants.

During the week, all work is contributed on a voluntary basis by the members of the organising club. **Members from all over the world join to discover Iceland's stunning natural landscapes, to strengthen friendships, to exchange experiences of projects, and to fundraise for projects in Iceland.** In short, they come to share the Soroptimist spirit!

Soroptimists are welcome to bring companions, husbands, children and friends. Please note, however, **that there are only 35 spots and that places will be allocated on a first come first serve basis.** So if you're interested, hurry!

For more information and to register, please click here.

POLISH AND BELGIAN SOROPTIMISTS JOIN FORCES

"There is already news from Clubs that there is incentive to change, that meetings are vibrant, that new ideas are arising, that discussions are held – there is a lot to do but the process of change has been launched!" Thus writes **Anna Wszelaczynska, Past President of Soroptimist International of Poland,** in her report concerning **a joint training recently held in Warsaw for more than 100 Polish Soroptimists**.



Taking place between 21-23 November 2014, the training was a **joint initiative between the Union of Poland and the Union of Belgium to support Polish Soroptimists.** The training came after a year in which some clubs in Poland were closed and membership numbers went down.

As Anna writes, **a Solidarity Fund grant that allowed Polish Soroptimists to attend the Governors' Meeting and Congress in Berlin in 2013 was the turning point**: it was then that Polish Clubs, which had felt quite isolated from the rest of the organisation and weren't sure about the direction they were supposed to take, "understood what a powerful and interesting organisation we belong to." The course was set for change.

The three-day training was an enormous success, full of presentations on different topics, and lively discussions on how energise the Soroptimist movement in Poland. Anna says it best in her report: "**SIE Vice President Tonny Filedt-Kok** opened our eyes to the new strategic and organisational model of Soroptimist, **Governor of the Belgian Union Carolien Demey,** with humour and deep knowledge, reminded us about the meaning of the logo and the history of Soroptimism, **Past President of SI Belgium Gerda Rosiers** gave a presentation on violence against women – a very interesting and unfortunately also important topic for Poland, and **Suzy Vanderbiesen** talked about modern media and ways of making our organisation more visible." There were also presentations by members of the Polish Union on communication and leadership (by **Iza Smieja**, **Kamila Luft**, and **Agnieszka Grabarz**) and about fundraising (by **Agnieszka Scigaj**), all of which met with **an excellent response from the audience who are already implementing what they learned.**

The success of this training is an excellent example for other Unions to follow – particularly those that are already **twinned** like the Union of Poland and the Union of Belgium. When times are changing, as they are now, **this kind of training and exchange can strengthen connections among members from different countries, focus our direction, and inject much enthusiasm and purpose into the development of new projects!**



WATER AND HEALTH: A GLOBAL PRIORITY

The World Economic Forum's *Global Risk Report* has this year, for the first time, **identified water overuse and water shortages as "the biggest societal and economic risk for the next ten years."** There are still some 2 billion people in the world using "water that is unsafe and dangerous for their health, and 3.4 billion people using water of doubtful quality." The report found that these problems are actually getting worse, with devastating effects for human health and wellbeing across the world.



It is within this context that we wish to remind our members of **our organisation's longstanding commitment to improving access to water and water quality for women around the world, and to our years-long partnership with the Women for Water Partnership (WfWP), a global alliance of women organisations and networks**, working on the interconnection between water, sustainable development and gender.

WfWP unites women's civil society across the globe and facilitates their collective contributions to achieve universal access to and the sustainable governance of water resources. The WfWP currently counts 26 **member organisations, including Soroptimist International of Europe, covering approximately 100 countries.** Members include rural women's organisations, academics, female water professionals, businesswomen, special interest groups, and service organisations such as ours.

The strong connection between WfWP and Soroptimist International of Europe is in large part due to the efforts of Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, President of WfWP since April 2014, who previously held the role President of SIE from 2007-2009 and acted as SIE representative to WfWP. Under her leadership, Soroptimists actively contributed to providing universal access to water and sanitation – a prerequisite for women's empowerment and social and economic development.

This year's World Economic Forum's *Global Risk Report* reminds us of the utmost importance of continuing this work, for the sake of the health of both people and planet.



The 20th Soroptimist International Convention *is shaping up nicely, with* ***many renowned speakers from around the world*** *already confirmed to attend! Don't miss this* ***unique opportunity to celebrate the work of Soroptimists****, to* ***learn from internationally-recognised experts****, and to* ***further the cause of women's rights*** *around the world! As you know, the 20th Convention will be taking place in the breathtakingly* ***beautiful city of Istanbul****—don't miss your chance to participate in this very special event!*

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PROGRAMME NEWS

A FEW WORDS ABOUT…

DR SUZANNE NOËL

This issue of *Programme News* being dedicated to Health, we thought it would be a great opportunity to remind you that **the founder of the Soroptimist movement in Europe was herself a doctor.** The extraordinary Dr Suzanne Noël was a plastic surgeon. It is widely known that she was **responsible for the founding of the first Soroptimist Club in Europe – in Paris** – but what is less known is that she was **also personally responsible for the establishment of Clubs in ten more countries in Europe and four in Asia.** Travelling widely in the 1920s and 1930s, she initiated the founding of Soroptimist Clubs in The Hague, Amsterdam, Milan, Vienna, Berlin, Anvers, Geneva, Tallinn, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Kyoto, Peking… Quite a record, you must admit!

You can read more about Suzanne Noël in the next edition of *The Link.* For now, we leave you with this striking picture of her.



IMPORTANT DATES

Mar 1 Zero Discrimination Day

Mar 3 World Wildlife Day

Mar 8 International Women's Day

Mar 22 World Water Day

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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