

a global voice  
for women

Soroptimist  International

## WHERE WE STAND

### The Soroptimist Position

Soroptimist International is a worldwide organisation for women in management and professions working through service projects to advance human rights and the status of women

## WHERE WE STAND POSITION PAPERS

In 1989 the Soroptimist International Board authorised publication of programme related statements representing the position of the membership worldwide on current topics of concern. Existing statements are updated regularly and new statements added to reflect changes in global circumstances and issues. Revised or new statements will be available for download from the SI website: [www.soroptimistinternational.org](http://www.soroptimistinternational.org) and from SI Headquarters and SI Federation Headquarters' offices.

*Where We Stand*, along with our quadrennial Programme Focus, is a tool for members to illustrate the breadth and depth of Soroptimist interests and involvement to local, national, and international officials, organisations and agencies. It is also an excellent source of information for new and potential members.

It is a guide to promote Soroptimist objectives at all levels of decision-making and a key to Soroptimist Awareness, Advocacy and Action, especially Advocacy.

The S.I. Constitution Article III states:

*"It is the policy of Soroptimist International to be concerned with international and national issues that relate to its objects and programmes. On matters of political controversy between nations, of party politics and of sectarian religion, Soroptimist International maintains a position of strict neutrality."*

However, we can and must be "politically" active in the sense of addressing issues which affect citizens, laws, public policy. S.I. encourages all members to be aware of and involved in issues of society which have "political" implications and to take positions of advocacy using the statements in this document as a guide. For effective advocacy, it is essential to know and understand all sides of an issue and recognize that attitudes and perspectives are often based on cultural practice and understanding. It is also important to consider and respect other opinions and viewpoints. Members initiating such a concern with their federations will receive communication about action that is undertaken or suggested by SI.

Some world situations that are so politically precarious and sensitive that it is prudent to request the International president, who is international spokesperson for Soroptimists, to take appropriate action, bearing in mind that well-intentioned advocacy in one part of the world may jeopardize women, particularly Soroptimists, elsewhere. Members are therefore advised to express concern about international issues through their federations to Soroptimist International.

Advocacy takes many forms - media releases, addressing public meetings, contacting officials, partnerships with government agencies and other NGOs. Acting through our Programme Focus and using *Where We Stand* Soroptimists can influence legislation and official policies at all levels of society.

### **The Golden Guide to Advocacy**

- Adhere to SI policy
- Designate a spokesperson for the issue
- Be well informed, consistent and succinct
- Educate members in the art of advocacy and keep them well informed about the issue
- Contact / target the appropriate people and decision makers
- Form partnerships with like-minded organisations
- Distribute regular media releases
- Monitor progress
- Be persistent, persuasive, passionate, polite, and politically sensitive

## **AWARENESS, ADVOCACY AND ACTION**

### **THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION A Contract with the Women of the World**

The Beijing Platform for Action was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995). Soroptimist International joins with women worldwide to ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women through the implementation of the Platform for Action.

#### **The Twelve critical areas of concern are:**

- The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women
- Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training
- Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to healthcare and related services
- Violence against women
- The effects of armed and other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation
- Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources
- Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels
- Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women
- Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women
- Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media
- Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment
- Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child

In 2000, a five-year review (known as Beijing + 5) of the Beijing Platform for Action took place at the United Nations General Assembly under the theme of "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century". At Beijing + 10, in March 2005, the Commission on the Status of Women reaffirmed its commitment to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

### **MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Soroptimist International is committed to the furtherance of the Millennium Development Goals, as enshrined in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2000.

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

## USEFUL RESOURCES

1. Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration
2. Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development & Peace for the 21st Century
3. United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
4. Millennium Development Goals
5. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
6. The Convention on the Rights of the Child
7. Agenda 21: UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)
8. Habitat II
9. The Progress of Nations (UNICEF)

## Soroptimist Resources

1. Reports of the SI Board, SI Representatives to the United Nations, SI Programme Director, SI Federation Programme Directors/Liaisons.
2. Programme Focus 2003–2007
3. Database of Programme Focus Reports (SI HQ)
4. The International Soroptimist Magazine
5. SI HQ, 87 Glisson Road, Cambridge CB1 2HG, United Kingdom  
T: +44 (0)1223 311833 F: +44 (0)1223 467951  
E: [hq@soroptimistinternational.org](mailto:hq@soroptimistinternational.org) W: [www.soroptimistinternational.org](http://www.soroptimistinternational.org)
6. Your Federation Headquarters Office

## Useful Websites

United Nations	<a href="http://www.un.org">www.un.org</a>
Unifem (United Nations Development Fund for Women)	<a href="http://www.unifem.org">www.unifem.org</a>
UN Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE)	<a href="http://www.un.org/womenwatch">www.un.org/womenwatch</a>
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime	<a href="http://www.unodc.org">www.unodc.org</a>
United Nations Children's Fund	<a href="http://www.unicef.org">www.unicef.org</a>
World Health Organisation	<a href="http://www.who.int">www.who.int</a>
United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids	<a href="http://www.unaids.org">www.unaids.org</a>
Millennium Development Goals	<a href="http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals">www.un.org/millenniumgoals</a>
United Nations Environment Programme	<a href="http://www.unep.org">www.unep.org</a>
UN Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation	<a href="http://www.unesco.org">www.unesco.org</a>

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## **Agenda 21. Environmental Challenges of Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference On Environment and Development, (UNCED), in Rio, 1992**

Soroptimist International fully supports the decisions taken at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio 1992 and urges all Governments to ratify and implement the Conventions on:

- Climate Change
- Biodiversity
- The fight against desertification
- and the statement of:
- Principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests

In order to implement Agenda 21, Soroptimist International asks its members:

- to become knowledgeable about the National Agenda 21 and especially the Local Agenda 21 which all countries and municipalities have been asked to establish
- to act within this framework, together with the community based organisations
- to increase their awareness, advocacy and action in order to influence decision makers and promote Agenda 21 at an early age, through education in schools, so that environmental concerns are given priority, particularly in the areas of:
  - **AIR QUALITY** - by reducing the emissions of chemicals which affect the climate, the depletion of the ozone layer, produce acid rain and which damage health
  - **WATER QUALITY** and **QUANTITY** - by reducing the pollution and consumption of water in industry, agriculture and domestic activities and by a close-to-nature, hydraulic management
  - **SOIL QUALITY** - by fighting against pollution, erosion, desertification, depletion and loss, caused by deforestation, intensive agriculture, industry, circulation and extension of habitat
  - **BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY** - especially in seas, rivers, lakes, on coral reefs, coasts and mountains, including forests and other ecosystems endangered by the destruction of the biotopes and excessive or indiscriminate harvesting of species with commercial value
  - **SOLID WASTE** - by prevention, recycling, reuse, and development of new management technologies
  - **TOXIC CHEMICALS** - by reduction, better controlled production, alternative technologies and education for safe usage
  - **ENERGY** - by economy and the use of alternative methods of production

*References: 1992 AGENDA 21, United Nations Environment Programme <http://www.unep.org>*

## **AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) - Revised 2006**

Soroptimist International recognizes HIV/AIDS to be a global pandemic, threatening human survival, human rights and human development and is committed to playing its full part, as a non-governmental organization, in response to this.

Soroptimist International has particular concern for the vulnerability of women to this disease and recognizes that the pandemic threatens the welfare of children everywhere, particularly in developing countries, by both killing children and creating orphans needing to be looked after by the extended and aging family. As well as being affected themselves, women are the major carers for other infected persons.

Acknowledging that many factors are involved in the spread of this disease – social, economic, political, cultural, religious, climatic and environmental as well as migration, commerce and tourism – Soroptimist International asks its members to continue to

- raise public awareness and disseminate information
- work to change attitudes and defend the human rights of patients
- lobby governments and international agencies for more resources, research and appropriate treatments
- raise the status of women to ensure their participation in prevention and control

Soroptimist International urges governments and all other appropriate bodies to

- provide effective and appropriate education/prevention programmes
- provide care to HIV-infected patients, ensuring equal standards and dignity to those available to patients suffering from other serious medical conditions
- demand and resource major efforts that include women in research and treatment development
- give particular attention to the treatment of pregnant women and to the newly born children of HIV positive mothers, to prevent mother to child transmission of this disease
- provide adequate resources to support both HIV and AIDS victims and their carers
- research for and provide appropriate anti-retro viral drugs, at affordable prices, to be used when medically indicated

Soroptimist International will network with governments, non-governmental, voluntary and all other appropriate bodies, including the United Nations, UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation, to encourage inter agency collaboration and co-operation, in recognition that only a global programme can be truly effective in combating this pandemic.

*References: Platform for Action and Beijing Declaration – Strategic Objective C – Women and Health  
Millennium Development Goals –*

## **Antarctic Protection**

Soroptimist International accepts the importance of the continent of Antarctica as a place of major scientific and environmental value and of international co-operation and peace. It recognises the need for comprehensive protection of the Antarctic continent and its dependent associated ecosystems and therefore endorses the objectives of the Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty on Environmental Protection and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.

Soroptimist International urges the international community to ensure:

- the application of and compliance with, specific rules covering environmental impact assessment, conservation of wild life, waste disposal and management and prevention of marine pollution
- that human activities in Antarctica be planned and conducted so as to limit adverse impact on its environment and dependent and associated ecosystems
- that scientific research activities on the continent be conducted in a way that ensures minimum environment cost
- that the prohibition on activity relating to mineral resources set forth in the Protocol be complied with

Soroptimist International encourages its members to ensure this compliance by understanding and monitoring the activities of their governments in Antarctica.

### **Anti-personnel Landmines**

Soroptimist International fully supports the Ottawa Treaty providing for the destruction and prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of Anti-personnel Landmines. Soroptimist International recognises that these landmines are widely distributed in many countries, are extremely hard to detect and cause death and infirmity to men, women and children, both during armed conflict and for many years afterwards. They affect all aspects of life, including security, health and development and impoverish communities by denying access to land and by destroying the environment, thus preventing social and economic recovery.

Soroptimist International urges all governments to:

- ratify and implement the Ottawa Treaty and the United Nations Inhumane Weapons Convention
- support and contribute to the International Fund, administered by the United Nations, to promote and finance awareness, clearance and eradication programmes, world-wide
- include, in the process of signing peace accords/agreements, the commitment to the eradication of all deployed landmines and destruction of stockpiles
- provide long term support to affected countries in their landmine removal efforts
- urge discussion and monitoring of the landmine issue at the annual UN Conference on Disarmament
- provide education and disseminate information to civilians, especially children, about the dangers of landmines
- develop comprehensive systems to promote the physical and psychological recovery, and social reintegration of victims

Soroptimist International advocates immediate and concerted action by governments, non-governmental and voluntary organisations, United Nations agencies and other appropriate services, to work in partnership, to alleviate the plight of all civilians, affected by landmines.

*References: Convention on Prohibition of Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti Personnel Landmines and on their Destruction  
Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) 1983, and its Protocol II on Restrictions of the Use of Landmines, Booby Traps and other Devices 1996*

### **Arms Limitation/Conflict Resolution**

Soroptimist International is committed to the achievement of world peace and supports the promotion of effective methods of conflict resolution and arms limitation, through security and justice.

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- ratify and implement all conventions and treaties relevant to the limitation and reduction of arms
- actively support United Nations' and other international peace-keeping initiatives
- strive for co-ordination in peace making and peace keeping activities, including economic and social development, elimination of hunger, poverty and drug trafficking
- include women in decision making processes concerning peace mediation and negotiation and in preventive diplomacy
- work towards the total and permanent elimination of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons by:
  - ◆ the implementation of effective sanctions for any breach of international agreements
  - ◆ the establishment of efficient systems of verification

- ◆ the establishment of a world fund to provide financial and practical assistance for countries which cannot afford to carry out weapons destruction and disposal in an environmentally safe way
- acknowledge that the limitation of arms and the reduction of the size of armed forces will have economic and subsequent social consequences for people of many countries, and co-operate internationally to establish new avenues of employment and industry to develop alternate utilisation of the technical skills of people so affected

Soroptimist International will continue to work with other non-governmental organisations and appropriate bodies, to monitor the actions of governments, in the realisation of world peace.

*Reference: Platform for Action - E*

## **Biotechnology, Biodiversity, Bioethics and Genetic Engineering**

Soroptimist International acknowledges the value to mankind of biological diversity. Although the current rapid advances in biotechnology have the potential for positive development in farming, food, health and habitat, they also give cause for concern.

Soroptimist International therefore advocates:

- the implementation by all signatories of The Convention on Biodiversity opened to signature at the UN Conference on Environment and Development ( the Earth Summit ) in Rio 1992 and entered into force December 1993
- full international support of the recommendations in Agenda 21, chapters 15/16 also agreed in Rio 1992
- the implementation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) guidelines on bio-safety, as outlined in UN decision 19/16 Nairobi 1997
- the development and implementation by Governments of a bio-safety protocol relating to issues such as the development, production and release of living modified organisms (LMOS), including risk assessment and management, safe handling and movement (particularly trans-boundary movement), protection of species and biodiversity, monitoring and compliance
- that UNEP, governments and relevant international bodies urgently address the ethical, psychological, medico-legal and human rights aspects of biotechnology and genetic engineering
- that the patenting of genetically living modified organisms and products thereof, be managed under an international agreement
- that there be global sharing of knowledge and technology relating to biotechnological development concerning indigenous peoples' knowledge
- that financial and human resources be intensified to assist biodiversity-rich developing countries in their conservation efforts
- partnerships between governments, the scientific community, the United Nations, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and financial institutions to ensure that the benefits (including commercial and economic) be equally shared between all the countries of the world

Soroptimist International urges all nations to develop and implement legislation to safeguard the health and human rights of individuals and to ban the production of human beings by cloning or other methods.

Soroptimist International asks its members to continue to raise awareness, promote the dissemination of information and to monitor government legislation, ethical standards and developments worldwide. It is committed to active participation by informed women in decision making, at all levels of society, regarding biotechnology, biodiversity, bioethics and genetic engineering.

*Reference: UN Conference on Environment and Development, Agenda 21*

## **Climate Change**

Soroptimist International recognises that climate change can be a natural process for the earth but human interference and pollution, especially from the burning of fossil fuels, have increased the rate of the process alarmingly, endangering thousands of plant and animal species and putting at risk the survival of humanity.

Soroptimist international supports the Convention on Climate Change adopted in Rio in 1992 and the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and urges governments of all countries to:

- ratify and implement the Convention and the Protocol, working together internationally to realise their aims
- encourage the development of alternative technologies
- encourage the concept of sustainable development
- require industries to develop and integrate environmental policies and use environmental management tools, such as audits and impact assessment.
- facilitate the transfer of financial and technological resources to developing countries
- provide funds for further research into the effects of climate change
- promote awareness programmes for children so that they recognise, at an early age, the value of a healthy environment and encourage them to become partners in maintaining the same
- disseminate information, using the media and other effective forms of publicity campaigns, to increase public awareness

Soroptimist International will work with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations to monitor the commitment of governments to the prevention of, and preparation for, climate change. Its members will also apply their power as consumers, to influence a change in attitudes and will apply in their private and professional lives, all the means possible to reduce the manmade pollution which contributes to climate change.

*References: 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change  
1992 Agenda 21, Sect II, Chapter 9 1997 Kyoto Protocol*

## **Diseases - Emerging and Re-emerging**

Soroptimist International recognises the problem of emerging and re-emerging diseases, especially those associated with resistance to treatment, such as malaria, diphtheria, cholera and tuberculosis. Soroptimist International is particularly aware of the vulnerability to tuberculosis (TB) of those with HIV/AIDS and the increased risk of TB infection to their carers (principally women) and their children.

Soroptimist International advocates:

- prevention of these diseases by vaccination/immunisation or the taking of suitable preventive medication
- the dissemination of information on the recognition, method of spread, prevention and treatment of these diseases
- the provision of resources for research into new treatments
- partnerships between governments, UN Agencies, the World Health Organisation and other relevant bodies, to combat this problem

Soroptimist International asks its members to work with other non-governmental, voluntary and all appropriate organisations to raise awareness, to promote the dissemination of information and to monitor the actions of governments and their partners, in response to emerging and re-emerging diseases.

## **Disease Prevention and Health Promotion - Revised 2006**

Soroptimist International believes in the importance of the promotion of wellness, disease prevention and the provision for early detection and intervention in diseases, with special emphasis on how these affect women.

Prevention has become increasingly important because of the escalating cost of health care and the likelihood that high cost could exclude some sections of the population from receiving adequate health services.

Soroptimist International also recognizes the problem of newly emerging and re-emerging infectious and transmissible diseases.

Soroptimist International therefore advocates

- the prevention of ill health arising from environmental and social factors by
  - the provision of safe water and adequate sanitation
  - the promotion of healthy life styles through better nutrition, exercise and hygiene
- the provision of health education and training, especially for women to
  - reduce the risk of such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, sexually transmitted diseases and cancer by the provision of early detection and intervention to prevent complications
  - prevent infections/transmissible diseases by the dissemination of information on disease recognition and method of spread, and encourage Immunization/vaccination and the taking of appropriate preventive medication
  - prevent substance misuse
  - minimize genetic risks
- the provision of adequate resources for gender based research into disease prevention and treatment of conditions affecting women's health and well being
- the provision of facilities for suitable transportation to areas of need, for
  - vaccines and drugs
  - appropriate medical equipment, and its long-term maintenance
- partnerships between governments, UN agencies, the World Health Organisation and other relevant bodies to combat these problems

Soroptimist International urges governments to act to ensure that these preventive measures are available to all people. It will work with other non-governmental and voluntary organizations to monitor the implementation of all commitments made by governments and professional agencies in these matters.

## **Drug and Substance Abuse**

Worldwide trends show increases in abuse of narcotic drugs, other drugs and substances by all segments of society, but particularly by young people. Soroptimist International is concerned about the detrimental effects to the overall health and well-being of the individual, family, community, and society, caused by drug and substance, including tobacco and alcohol, abuse and dependency. Its members are aware of the need for continued and strengthened focus on national and international programmes of collaboration, co-operation and intervention, to bring about changes in these trends.

Soroptimist International supports global programmes and activities which:

- tend to curb illegal growth, production, transport and trafficking of narcotics and other drugs of abuse
- consider each individual country's involvement and the intricacies inherent in both the drug "supply" and "demand" situations
- recognise the necessity and priority that must be given to the review of the socio-economic and agricultural situations existing in specific drug "supply" countries and to the promotion of studies of alternative methods for economic and agricultural development

Soroptimist International supports the concept of the development of clinics and other services for those who genuinely wish to overcome their addiction and advocates that:

- services are provided in a suitable clean environment
- recognition is given to the human rights of individuals
- relevant support services are provided
- outcomes of treatment are evaluated statistically and relevant reports are provided

Since substance abuse and addiction relate to products which are, in the main, readily available for purchase, the only form of prevention and treatment is by education and support of the addict, their family and friends. Soroptimist International therefore encourages its members to continue their work with governments, non-governmental organisations, voluntary agencies and other relevant bodies, to develop programmes of education and support at local, national and international level.

## **Economic Globalisation**

Soroptimist International recognises that the rapid rise of economic globalisation has created new economic, social and political challenges, especially for women. Aspects of globalisation have potential for positive advances. However, they present equal potential for increased social and economic division and transnational crime. They threaten the ability of nations to ensure that development is both economically and environmentally sustainable and have contributed to the widening gap between rich and poor nations and between the rich and poor within nations. New mechanisms are needed to ensure that benefits are shared more equitably and that negative impacts on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups — especially women, children and the poor — are recognised and redressed.

Soroptimist International urges recognition that economic policies driven entirely by the concept of a free market and trade liberalization can result in:

- increased reliance of developing countries on imports, with resulting trade imbalances that increase their debt and poverty levels
- export-driven domestic production in developing countries, with cash crops replacing local food crops and less sustainable agricultural practices
- exploitation of resources — both human and natural — for the benefit of foreign agencies, with little or no commitment to the ongoing health of the local society or environment
- increased unemployment, as workers are displaced from local industries unable to compete

- in a globalised marketplace, with women often the first to lose their jobs
- increased social disruption, as local knowledge and practice are devalued in favour of technology-based methods
- industrial and corporate practices that place some workers, especially women, in unregulated, unprotected and underpaid working conditions
- financial volatility and economic crisis, resulting from speculative and uncontrolled capital flow

Soroptimist International therefore urges international organisations and financial institutions, including transnational companies, to:

- include explicitly in their policies, measures which address human rights and adhere to internationally accepted United Nations Conventions
- consider cancellation of crippling debt in the poorest of countries
- avoid imposition of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) that result in reduced education and health funding in indebted nations
- assist developing countries to compete globally and to introduce poverty reduction programmes
- continue interactive dialogue with civil society in establishing development policy

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- co-operate in establishing systems to counteract the negative impacts of economic globalisation upon women and children
- develop policies that encourage the equitable participation of women in economic activity and decision-making
- consider alternative economic models, which place value on national assets and human resources, not just monetary policy and increased annual Gross National Product (GNP)
- consider introducing taxes on large-scale currency exchanges (Tobin Tax)
- work to establish infrastructure and education programmes that ensure equitable access to advances in digital information and communication technology, which will ensure the broadest possible participation in the new knowledge-based, global economy.

Soroptimist International supports co-operation between governments, civil society and the global private sector, which recognises that both the new global economy and society must be underpinned by concerns for the environment and for labour and human rights, as much as by market forces. Soroptimist International encourages its members to be thoughtful consumers, identifying and avoiding investment in and purchases from, companies failing to adhere to accepted international standards. It will continue to work with other agencies to establish education and training programmes and micro-enterprises specifically for women and will support programmes that enhance the economic independence of those most disadvantaged by current social and economic policies.

## **Employment Opportunities for Women**

Soroptimist International fully supports the promotion of women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, as stated in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and advocates the creation of more employment opportunities for women.

Soroptimist International recognises that women contribute to development and to the maintenance of social structure through unpaid labour, which is rarely measured in quantitative terms and is undervalued in national accounts. Recognising also that the skills of women, if better utilised, could constitute a major contribution to the economic life of their respective countries, Soroptimist International urges governments, the public and private sector, international development agencies, private enterprises and non-profit making groups to:

- explore the possibilities of creating new employment opportunities for women in areas of industry which have traditionally been male dominated and in the field of new technology where tradition is not yet established
- ensure equal access for women to effective training, retraining, counselling and placement services that are not limited to traditional employment areas
- involve local women, who are familiar with the needs of their communities, in the planning and implementation of development projects
- review and revise their present training and employment practices to facilitate the employment of women who also carry major domestic responsibilities
- establish affordable, accessible, high quality support services to promote the reconciliation of career and family responsibility
- adjust employment policies to facilitate the restructuring of work patterns in order to promote the sharing of family responsibilities and to guarantee equal pay for work of equal value
- ensure that the "new" work patterns – part time, flexible hours etc. - are included within a satisfactory legislative framework
- adopt and implement laws against gender discrimination in the labour market
- adopt and maintain international labour standards

Soroptimist International will work with other appropriate organisations to realise these aims.

*Reference: Platform for Action 1995: Section F-150-165; F1 p. 97; F1 p. 98; F1 p.99*

## **Energy**

Soroptimist International recognises that fossil fuel resources are known to be finite; that the burning of fossil fuels in the production of energy contributes greatly to the greenhouse effect and that the building of large, hydro-nuclear or fossil fuel fired, power generation plants is often economically unsound and environmentally unacceptable.

Soroptimist International therefore considers it essential that governments:

- ensure that their energy policies are reviewed and revised to incorporate energy conservation strategies
- levy environmental taxes to discourage the unsustainable use of materials and energy
- halt the subsidising of forest clear-cutting
- discourage the inefficient use of energy caused by the excessive use of electricity and sales of electrical appliances
- fund further research and development devices for alternative energy production from renewable resources
- develop and disseminate information and education on energy conservation

Soroptimist International members will work to increase their own awareness and that of others, and to apply in their private and professional lives all means to save energy and to use alternative, renewable resources. Working in partnership with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations, Soroptimist International will advocate for the review of all governments' energy policies.

*Reference: 1992 Agenda 21, Section II, Chapter 9*

## **Equality of Access to Education**

Soroptimist International is committed to the ideal of equal educational opportunities for all throughout life, believing that education is a human right and essential for the achievement of equality, development and peace.

It fully supports the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, where education is a component of every critical area of concern.

Soroptimist International emphasises as a priority, the need for basic literacy, functional literacy and continuous development of effective teaching methods, including audio-visual educational tools, mass media and computer technology. It supports the involvement of educators in developing such programmes and tools.

Soroptimist International also supports programmes which:

- actively promote policies in favour of girls and women in order to eliminate gender disparity
- offer girls and women flexible education and training and retraining programmes, for lifelong learning
- encourage the achievement of higher educational and professional qualifications by women
- influence policy to allocate resources for education to provide appropriate educational facilities for establishments and for individuals
- provide appropriate educational programmes which advise women of their legal rights and of the agencies available for their assistance
- encourage total quality and ethics in educational programmes
- encourage educational programmes in inter-cultural understanding
- encourage specific functional literacy and vocational programmes for rural, migrant, refugee and internally displaced women, women with disabilities and those suffering as a result of violent conflict

Soroptimist International strongly supports the participation of women at all levels of national policy making, programme formulation and project implementation in the field of education. It recognises that the role of women, as potential community leaders in a wide range of education related activities, is enhanced by encouragement and by providing opportunities to complete formal studies, to receive training and to develop skills.

Soroptimist International urges Governments, and in particular education authorities, to:

- allocate appropriate budget resources
- create gender sensitive systems and eliminate discrimination at all levels of education
- provide primary education in all countries before 2015
- ensure women's equal access to career development
- increase the enrolment and improve the retention rate for girls and promote the continued education of pregnant adolescents and young mothers
- improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education

- encourage girls to pursue academic, scientific and technical curricula, which widen their future career opportunities

In working towards these aims, Soroptimist International will co-operate with government and non-governmental organisations, voluntary organisations and related UN agencies, locally and internationally, and will endeavour to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and information.

*Reference: Platform for Action 1995, Chapter 4, Section B, 69; Section B, 80-83*

## **Equal Opportunity for Women**

Soroptimist International is committed to the achievement of equal rights in economic, educational, social and political opportunity for all people and has particular concern for women.

Soroptimist International endorses the strategies and objectives stated in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Recognising that even where there is equality in law, there is not always equality in practice, Soroptimist International advocates that the strategy of gender mainstreaming be implemented in all government policy and legislation.

Soroptimist International accordingly urges governments to:

- enact and implement legislation which establishes equal rights and opportunities
- provide, without fear of reprisal, simple, accessible, speedy procedures for dealing with complaints by women of infringement of the law
- establish effective mechanisms for investigating and dealing with violation
- offer support services and guidance to women on affirmative action, voluntary policies and when bringing action against discriminatory treatment
- encourage the voluntary adoption of equal opportunity policies by major organisations in the public and private sectors
- ratify, implement and take positive action to improve the disadvantaged situation of women, as allowed for in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- develop a comprehensive human rights education programme to raise awareness among women of their human rights and to raise awareness among others of the human rights of women
- disseminate information about equal rights and opportunities in language that can be understood, even by those with limited literary skills
- undertake gender specific research and publish gender specific information and statistics

Soroptimist International will work in partnership with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations, related UN agencies, locally and internationally, to promote equality of opportunity, and to monitor the performance of governments and others in relation to this.

*References: Platform For Action 1995, Strategic Objective I.1,I.2,I.3,230-233*

## **Eradication of Illiteracy**

Soroptimist International is concerned that more than two thirds of the world's 960 million illiterate adults are women and that this continuing high rate of illiteracy remains a severe impediment to the advancement and development of women and girls.

The eradication of illiteracy among women is a clearly stated strategic objective in the Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Soroptimist

International fully supports the Platform for Action and believes literacy is the key to:

- improving education, health and nutrition in the family
- empowering women to participate in decision making

Soroptimist International urges governments, national, regional and international bodies, bilateral and multilateral donors and non-governmental organisations of all nations to:

- afford high priority to reducing the female illiteracy rate by resolving the social, economic and ecological problems known to affect literacy with emphasis on rural, migrant, refugee and internally displaced women, women with disabilities and those suffering as a result of violent conflict
- provide universal access to, and seek to ensure gender equality in, the completion of primary education by the year 2015
- ensure the allocation of sufficient resources to provide for quality programmes and strategies
- encourage adult and family engagement in learning to promote total literacy for all people
- eliminate the gender gap in basic and functional literacy
- narrow the disparity between developed and developing countries
- address new challenges and trends such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, safe motherhood, the environment, tolerance, peace and human rights teaching
- promote, together with literacy, life skills and scientific and technological knowledge and work towards an expansion of the definition of literacy

Soroptimist International will continue to work with governments, non-governmental organisations, voluntary organisations and related UN agencies, locally and internationally, through its many literacy projects, to further the aim of eradicating illiteracy, and will monitor the implementation of all commitments made by government and professional agencies, to this aim.

*References: Platform for Action 1995, Chapter 4, Section B, 69; Section B, 81  
The Progress of Nations 1997, Pages 50, 51*

### **Ethnic Minorities - Indigenous Peoples - Racism**

Soroptimist International believes that discrimination between people on the grounds of race, creed or ethnic origin, is a violation of human rights and should be condemned as such.

Soroptimist International supports the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the Decade for the Worlds Indigenous Peoples, 1994-2004 and, in particular, Articles 1.1, 12.1, 26 and 27, of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and therefore urges all governments to:

- ratify and implement all International Covenants, Declarations and Conventions which relate to human rights, especially to the social, economic and educational rights of women and children
- apply within their own activities the standards of these Covenants, Declarations and Conventions
- develop social and educational programmes aimed at the elimination of all forms of discrimination
- assist migrant people to integrate into their adopted country while maintaining their own cultural identity
- develop initiatives which will help to build bridges between indigenous people and the wider community
- recognise indigenous people as an inseparable part of the world's cultural heritage and support their preservation and protection
- work in collaboration with the other countries of the world to guarantee human rights and equality for all, and to encourage mutual respect amongst all people

Soroptimist International will work with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations, with governments and all appropriate agencies to influence legislation for the elimination of all forms of discrimination. Its members will use their skills to promote international goodwill and understanding, so that all people may live amicably with one another.

*Reference: Covenant on Civil and Political Rights  
Ethnic Minorities*

## **Female Genital Mutilation**

Soroptimist International is concerned that the effects of many harmful traditional practices, which still exist in some countries as a result of the combination of deeply-rooted traditional, psychological, religious, sexual and psycho-sexual beliefs, have damaging effects on the mental and physical health of millions of women and girls.

Of particular concern to the members of Soroptimist International is the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), defined as all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-therapeutic purposes.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that up to 135 million girls and women have undergone such procedures and that each year a further 2 million are thought to be at risk.

Soroptimist International believes such FGM to be a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Soroptimists support the WHO and UNICEF's condemnation of the practice of FGM and share their belief that its elimination will be brought about by education rather than by penal repression.

Soroptimist International urges its members to:

- become informed about FGM and its effects on women and girls and their families
- lobby for legislation prohibiting FGM and for prosecution in every country
- lobby for the enforcement of existing legislation prohibiting FGM and for prosecution in every country
- seek the co-operation of the media to break the silence about FGM, including the provision of information in relevant languages

In those countries where FGM is practised, Soroptimist International will:

- work with local governments, health officials, and community leaders of affected countries in developing appropriate educational materials that include information regarding human biology, personal hygiene, sexually transmitted diseases and other genito-urinary health issues
- assist women and girls to gain access to quality health care
- support health and education programmes and self-help groups in communities where FGM continues
- work with other organisations to remove social pressures for FGM
- investigate and promote alternative training/employment for women engaged as practitioners/ professional excisors
- support creative, socially acceptable, alternative 'rite of passage practices' that replace FGM with other practices that celebrate girls becoming women

Recognising that diverse strategies will be required to eliminate FGM, Soroptimist International calls upon all governments to:

- intensify efforts to develop awareness of FGM and mobilise public opinion for its elimination, through education and training campaigns
- develop clear national policies for the abolition of FGM, including legislation which prohibits the practice and provides for enforcement, punishment for the perpetrator and compensation for the victim
- provide appropriate rehabilitation and treatment for girls and young women who have suffered the consequences of FGM
- provide quality health care for women and girls

Soroptimist International will continue to work to convince governments to forbid, by law, the harmful practice of FGM and is committed to supporting the implementation of such laws once passed.

### **Food and Food Security (famine) - Revised 2006**

Soroptimist International recognises that famine, hunger and food insecurity results from

- poverty and is a cause of poverty
- the impact of environmental degradation and natural disasters
- high rates of population growth or population movement [displacement] and instability
- armed conflict and insecurity
- the lack of access by food producers, many of whom are women, to improved agricultural technology, financial and other resources, to education or training
- inadequate storage facilities and other means of food preservation
- the effects of the international market
- ineffective and inadequate food distribution systems, sometimes even within the framework of humanitarian aid.

Soroptimist International therefore urges governments and other appropriate bodies to include the following strategies to invest in sustainable long-term agricultural recovery and assistance programmes

- investment in the rural economy
- the addressing of major short and long term environmental, economic and social threats to food production and distribution
- the establishment and maintenance of an agricultural pricing system to ensure that small farm food producers receive adequate and fair financial compensation for their work, access to markets and to serve as an incentive to subsistence farming and increased food production
- public education programmes to develop social awareness aimed at promoting and supporting subsistence farming and raising the social status of women subsistence farmers
- the provision of realistic opportunities for agricultural training at all levels within local communities and through international fellowship programmes, structured to maximise benefit to local rural development
- the provision of programmes of agricultural and environmental technical co-operation, to enable local and other experts to work together to develop services in rural sectors and disaster-stricken areas
- the provision to food producers of appropriate and adequate subsidised supplies of good quality seeds, fertilisers, agricultural tools and equipment, to promote self-sufficiency
- the improvement of women's access to land and land tenure, financial and credit arrangements, to facilitate women's role as equal partners in agricultural development and as food producers

- the development of the rural infrastructure, to provide and support food producers, particularly the small-holder producer, to obtain cooperative access to adequate storage facilities, agricultural tools and machinery, transport, marketing, and associated services at a reasonable cost in relation to income

Soroptimist International will work with governments, other non-governmental and voluntary organisations, UN agencies and other relevant bodies to increase public awareness of and advocacy for, the needs of famine stricken countries. Soroptimist members will use their power as consumers to support developing countries and especially to promote the cause of women in those countries.

*References: 1992 UNCED Agenda 21, Sect I and Sec II Food, Nutrition and Agriculture*  
[www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org) – *Responding to Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*  
[www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/economic/esn/nutri](http://www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/economic/esn/nutri)  
 MDG #1

## **Freshwater**

Soroptimist International believes that all people have a right to clean, safe drinking water and sanitation and that governments of all countries must co-operate to safeguard this right.

Soroptimist International recognises that access to safe water and adequate sanitation is the foundation of development and that rare water resources can be at the origin of struggles between population groups.

Soroptimist International therefore urges governments to ensure the right to safe water for all people by:

- safeguarding water resources throughout the whole water-cycle by ensuring that water management practices follow, as far as possible, those of nature
- integrating all strategies, using the principle of sustainable development, to provide enough freshwater for healthy drinking and necessary sanitation purposes
- promoting water-saving and water-recycling schemes and ensuring safe sewage disposal, with the use of financial incentives if necessary
- protecting the quality and quantity of underground water by regulating the input of pesticides and fertilisers in agriculture and chemicals used in industrial processes and by conserving the maximum permeability of the soil
- sharing skills, technologies and research data pertaining to freshwater provision and protection, to help ensure the sustainability of this essential resource

Soroptimist International urges governments to encourage women in their role as family managers, water-consumers and potential water-conservers to:

- participate in and promote public education programmes about these topics
- participate actively in the planning and implementation, at all levels, of programmes to improve water supply, sanitary conditions and public health, particularly in communities where the quantity and/or quality of water is inadequate
- adopt a sense of personal responsibility for the environment in their use of water
- adopt a global integrative strategy for the provision and conservation of water, with consideration of all the aspects of the water-cycle

Soroptimist International will work with governments, other non-governmental and voluntary organisations and with all appropriate agencies to increase public awareness of, and sensitivity to, environmental and developmental problems in relation to water supply and quality; to advocate that

governments assist women in less privileged regions to improve their access to clean water and adequate sanitation.

*References: 1992 UNCED Agenda 21, Section II, Chapt. 18  
1985 Nairobi, Forward Looking Strategies: 224, 225, 226 and 227*

## **Global Co-operation**

Soroptimist International is committed to global co-operation, including in its objectives "international understanding and universal friendship".

To further this aim amongst its members it encourages clubs to establish "Friendship Links" with clubs in different countries. It also encourages the development of co-operation, through networking, and participation in programmes which increase knowledge and understanding of different cultures, economic systems and life-styles.

Such programmes may include:

- youth exchanges
- adult exchanges
- language courses
- friendship grants
- joint projects
- comparative studies

Soroptimist International recognises the value of sharing projects with international organisations at local, national and international level, when mutual interest has been identified. It also supports the sharing of expertise and Soroptimist members will attend relevant international meetings both as observers and participants.

Soroptimist International supports co-operation with appropriate United Nations agencies when these help to achieve Soroptimist objectives. When appropriate, Soroptimist International may produce joint statements with like-minded international organisations accredited to the United Nations.

## **Habitat**

Soroptimist International believes that shelter, with security, stability, infrastructural support and access to employment and community services is a basic human right. It further believes that a safe habitat will contribute to the reduction of many world problems, including conflict, crime, violence and disease, and that provision for adequate housing should be made an international priority.

Soroptimist International, recognising the acceleration of global urbanisation, advocates that all development must be ecologically, socially and economically sustainable and that all those involved in planning and development, in both the public and private sectors, should ensure that:

- women participate in planning, design and development
- land resources, cultural needs, economic potential and job opportunities in rural areas are substantially developed to prevent excessive population movement
- local resources and expertise are utilised and local maintenance/training programmes are established
- conditions with respect to climate, water supply, environmental impacts, accessibility and communication are fully researched and utilised

Soroptimist International endorses the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000, the findings of the United Nations Conference Habitat II 1996 and urges governments to ensure that:

- housing developments meet the needs of families, single persons, the elderly, those requiring special care and other socially vulnerable groups, including street children
- women have the right to become involved in construction skills and have access to land, building materials as well as training, financial, legal, technical assistance and support
- women have the right to succeed to and gain property by inheritance

Soroptimist International urges its members to:

- participate actively in the planning and development of their community, especially within the framework of a local, municipal Agenda 21
- maintain and improve the quality of life by working for a sustainable development with regard to water and energy consumption, transportation, waste management, noise level and nature around the habitat
- be aware that security, as a critical ingredient of the quality of life, should be preserved and crime and violence prevented, by the fostering of social justice

Human security is a universal concern which is easier to ensure through early prevention rather than later intervention and it is dependent upon an individual's economic and social environment. Soroptimist International therefore advocates that all people should have the opportunity to meet their most essential needs and to earn their own living, thus enabling them to make a full contribution to their own development, that of their community, their country and the world.

Soroptimist International urges its members to work in partnership with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations and other appropriate agencies towards the provision and protection of a secure habitat for all people, as a critical ingredient of the quality of life and social justice.

*References: United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio 1992  
Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995  
United Nations Conference, Habitat II, Istanbul 1996*

## **Human Rights Education**

Soroptimist International believes that the understanding and experience of human rights is essential to peace and development in a world where individuals may make free choices for their own lives. Concepts associated with human rights should be acquired from early stages in life, beginning within the family and continuing into formal education.

Soroptimist International urges governments to develop and provide education programmes, appropriate to all ages throughout the life cycle, which enable students to:

- develop awareness and understanding of the basic sanctity of all human beings
- recognise and respect the diversity of races, cultures and creeds
- establish, respect and support positive and non-repressive inter-personal and international relationships
- express ideas in a responsible manner
- resolve conflicts in a non-violent way
- participate in decision making and in the implementation of these decisions
- develop an understanding of, and sympathy for, the concepts of justice, freedom, dignity and equality
- become aware of human rights issues set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as-

- \* the right to nationality and to seek asylum from persecution
- \* the right to legal services, representation and fair judgement
- \* the right to freedom from torture, cruel and unusual punishment, arbitrary arrest, detention or exile
- \* the rights and responsibilities of choices made in one's own life, in work, leisure, expression of beliefs, in bearing children, ownership of property, participating in government etc.

Soroptimist International will work in partnership with governments, other non-governmental and voluntary organisations, UN agencies and the media, to raise awareness of human rights; in particular it will monitor actions in relation to the rights of women and children.

*References: UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948  
UN ABC Teaching Human Rights; Platform for Action 1995, Section I & 233 f*

## **International Debt**

A combination of falling commodity prices and spiralling interest rates following a period of increased borrowing in the 1970's has resulted in a number of 'severely indebted low-income countries'. The resulting crushing financial burden has crippled economically weak countries and the most vulnerable members of their population, namely women and children. Servicing the debt has drained resources needed for essential services such as education, health care, nutrition and water. Yet the cost of meeting basic human needs is significantly less than the annual cost of meeting just one third of the interest due on the burden of debt. Indications are that most of this debt can never be repaid.

Soroptimist International is convinced that only a global strategy will bring an end to the burden of debt that has eroded living standards and widened inequalities between rich and poor. Soroptimist International calls upon member nations to embark upon a strategy to combat structural poverty and regenerate nations through educational opportunities.

Soroptimist International urges governments to: -

- honour the commitments made at the World Summit for Children in 1990 particularly in the final Declaration and Plan of Action, and reinforced in the Declaration adopted at the World Summit for Social Development 1995, which called specifically for debt cancellation and conversion to meet social priorities
- ensure that Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) include basic services essential to the survival and development of women and children
- cancel all debt owed to donor countries by the most severely indebted low-income countries

Soroptimist International also urges that the world's leading industrial nations should: -

- accelerate the reduction of restrictive trade practices as intended by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) accord
- increase aid to developing countries in accordance with the 20/20 Initiative launched at the International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994
- extend the number of countries which they agreed at their May 1999 G8 meeting in Cologne, Germany, should have their debts reduced

Soroptimist International also calls for a reduction in debts owed to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Soroptimist International members will work with other non-governmental organisations to monitor the implementation of commitments to the debt crisis and to anti-poverty programmes made by governments and financial institutions. Its members will work to alleviate poverty wherever possible. They will continue to speak out against any misdirection of resources at the expense of basic social services for women and children.

'severely indebted low-income countries' – *World Bank definition*.

## **Issues of Contemporary Slavery**

Soroptimist International is concerned that, despite the progress made in the protection of human rights and the preservation of human dignity, various forms of slavery still exist all over the world.

Soroptimist International recognises the definition of contemporary slavery and practices akin to slavery set out in the Slavery Convention (1953) the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956); the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (1949) and the International Labour Organisation Convention.

It is particularly concerned for those elements of contemporary slavery which relate to the traffic in persons, sales of children, child prostitution, prostitution and persons trapped in exploitative working systems. Such activities are incompatible with human rights, human dignity and values; and jeopardise the welfare of individuals, families and society as a whole.

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- ratify and implement all relevant International Conventions
- break the circle of poverty and exploitation by addressing the economic and social causes
- develop and enforce legislation to outlaw forced and bonded labour
- provide these vulnerable groups with programmes of training and education which will lead to alternative employment
- advise and educate the consumer to purchase only products that have not been produced by exploitation
- take all possible measures to combat sex tourism both in the countries from which the customer comes and in the countries to which they go
- penalise the marketing and advertising of sex with children on the same level as procurement
- direct effective measures upon all who profit from the traffic, sale and sexual exploitation of persons

Soroptimist International calls for concerted action at local, national and international levels to focus attention on problems of exploitation through slavery-like practices in order to eliminate all vestiges of slavery throughout the world.

It urges all members to raise the level of concern over exploitative practices and their consequences for the health, education and development of the people involved.

## **Nuclear Energy**

Soroptimist International recognises the benefits to the world of nuclear energy, but is concerned at the possibilities of radioactive contamination of the environment, with all the inherent dangers of such contamination, for the health of the peoples of the world and the spoliation of the environment on which these peoples depend for their very existence.

Soroptimist International therefore urges all governments concerned with the export or import of nuclear materials to:

- sign and strictly adhere to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty of 1968
- sign and strictly adhere to the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, allowing only the simulation of nuclear explosions in laboratory conditions
- sign and strictly adhere to the Convention on Marine Pollution of 1972 which protects the world's seas from the ravages of manmade pollution
- ensure that local authorities are fully prepared to react to all possible nuclear incidents
- disseminate, to the population in the locality of nuclear installations, information concerning the global intervention plan in case of an accident and the first measures to take
- insist on a safe and environmentally sound management of radioactive wastes, including safe transportation and disposal
- reduce the use of nuclear energy to a strict minimum

Soroptimist International will work with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations to monitor the actions of governments, to raise awareness of the inherent dangers of nuclear material and to acknowledge the benefits of its peaceful use.

*References: UNCED Agenda 21, Sect II, Chapter 22, 1992*

## **Oceans, Seas and Coastal Areas**

Soroptimist International believes that all marine environments form an integrated whole that is an essential component of the global life support system - a positive asset that presents opportunities for sustainable development.

Soroptimist International urges all governments to:

- ratify and implement all relevant existing international and regional treaties, conventions and protocols, that protect the High Seas, Exclusive Economic Zones, Coastal Areas and Small Islands
- identify land-based sources of pollution, including agricultural and industrial effluents
- eliminate illegal discharges and dumping at sea of all waste products, especially radioactive wastes
- control fishing and fleets, especially those using drift net fishing, that deplete stocks and species of no commercial interest
- advocate sustainable use and conservation of marine living and non-living resources of the high seas and those under national jurisdiction
- monitor human coastal settlements
- develop tourism that respects local traditions, the quality of coastal life and its nature
- share the skills, technologies and research data pertaining to marine environment
- ensure equal access for women to education and training, and to participate in decision making, regarding sustainable development of marine resources and aqua-culture
- engage in joint ventures, internationally, for the resolution of points of conflict

Soroptimist International asks its members to work with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations and appropriate agencies to increase public awareness of, advocacy for, and sensitivity to, the protection of the marine environment and to initiate actions in protecting the coastal and marine landscape, flora and fauna.

*Reference: UNCED 1992 AGENDA 21, part II, chapter 17*

## **Ozone Layer Depletion**

Soroptimist International is concerned about the depletion of the ozone layer by Chlorofluorocarbon (CFCs) and halon gases and the subsequent risk of damage to human, animal, and plant life and to the food chain, from increasing amounts of ultra-violet radiation penetrating the earth's atmosphere.

Soroptimist International applauds the successful reduction of ozone destroying CFC emissions since 1987, but continues to urge all governments concerned with the manufacture, use, import and export of CFCs and halon gases to:

- continue to respect their commitments
- provide funds for further research into the effects of ozone layer depletion
- encourage the development of appropriate alternative technologies
- raise public awareness about the danger of the continuing high levels of ultra-violet radiation

Soroptimist International members will continue to increase their own awareness and that of others, and to work with appropriate agencies to advocate for the respect of government commitments. Its members will apply in their private and professional lives all the means possible to help reduce the use of products that destroy the ozone layer and increase ultra-violet radiation.

*References: 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer  
1987 Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer as amended  
1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change  
1992 Agenda 21, Sec II Chapter 9 Internet <http://www.unep.ch/ozone>*

## **Parent Development Programmes**

Soroptimist International fully supports implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by both developed and developing countries. Article 18 of that Convention recognises that parents or legal guardians have primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child and declares that the State should support them with appropriate assistance.

Soroptimist International also supports the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, in its strategic objective of 'strengthening the role of the family' through the formulation of policies and programmes which help the family in its supporting, educating and nurturing roles.

Soroptimist International believes that children require an integrated childhood care system which provides:

- health care and adequate nutrition
- motor/sensory and mental stimulation to foster physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social development

This system traditionally involves parents or legal guardians or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, as well as support provided by the State.

Soroptimist International recognises that profound disruptions have occurred in traditional family support systems through population movements between urban and rural areas, international migration, poverty, famine, armed conflict and a rapidly changing technology. Increasing numbers of children, including those born to single teenage mothers and to street children, may be subject to risk with regard to their emotional, physical, social and intellectual development.

Many parents or legal guardians and, where applicable, members of the extended family or community lack, or are unable to apply, the parenting skills that will provide an integrated childhood care system for their children. In many instances the only parenting skills they have are those learned from their own parents or other adults and they feel themselves ill- equipped to meet their parenting tasks. Those adults who work directly with children, such as teachers, counsellors, psychologists, social workers and medical personnel have usually had special training.

Soroptimist International believes that the provision of parent or legal guardian development programmes should be a multi-level, multi-agency effort, involving governmental, non-governmental agencies and the media, which should provide quality programmes adapted to the specific socio-cultural settings of the communities they serve.

It advocates the formation of high quality parent-development programmes and will continue to work with government, non-governmental organisations, voluntary organisations and related UN agencies locally and internationally to encourage activities which strengthen the capacity of parents and others concerned in the provision of adequate care and education of children.

Soroptimist International urges its members to:

- promote the dissemination and use of existing knowledge on child development and on successful community based training and development programmes
- work with the local school systems at all levels, as well as with medical professionals, to develop and provide community-based family support programmes to enhance parents', potential parents' or legal guardians' knowledge of child development, the legal rights of children and skills in child care and education
- encourage governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations to support research efforts and methods of monitoring intervention procedures, on the topics of AIDS, child prostitution, child slavery, teenage pregnancies and single parent families
- campaign for low cost public education which addresses parenting and child development, mediation, conflict management and communication and listening skills

*References: Vienna, NGO Committee on the Family  
Platform for Action 1995, Chapter 4, Section L, 285*

## **Peace**

Soroptimist International believes that to live in peace should be the objective of all peoples and that peace cannot be measured solely by the absence of conflict. It recognises that peace is inter-related with the just sharing of natural resources, social and economic development and the promotion of human rights.

Soroptimist International supports:

- early education that promotes the concepts of justice, freedom, dignity and equality for all people, regardless of race, culture, creed or gender

- the positive contribution to peace that can be made by women's organisations within a framework that encourages the free exchange of ideas and expressions, between communities and individuals from differing countries and cultures
- the inclusion of women as members of delegations to negotiate international agreements relating to peace

Soroptimist International urges governments to work together for:

- greater international goodwill and understanding
- a just sharing of the world's resources
- the promotion of human rights for all people

Soroptimist International, through its involvement in world-wide international goodwill and understanding programmes, especially for young people, seeks to implement in practical ways its commitment to the goals of peace, security and justice for all the people of the world, and to create more awareness of the contribution that all women can make to world peace.

### **Peace Teaching**

Soroptimist International recognises that the attainment of peace demands mutual understanding and patient negotiation, and that tolerance and respect for the rights of others must begin early in life, beginning within the family and continuing into formal education.

Soroptimist International supports education programmes that develop in pupils the ability to:

- recognise and respect the diversity of races, cultures and creeds
- establish, respect and support positive interpersonal and international relationships
- resolve conflict in a non violent way
- participate in decision making and the implementation of those decisions
- develop values which place concern for others above that of self
- understand that human rights are essential to the promotion of peace and development
- understand and have sympathy with the concepts of justice, freedom, dignity and equality

Soroptimist International urges governments and educators to review and revise, if necessary, all educational materials which:

- nurture racial or national arrogance
- cultivate racial, cultural and religious prejudice
- promote racism and racial discrimination
- incite physical violence

Soroptimist International encourages its members to work with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations to monitor the provision and implementation by governments, of appropriate education programmes.

### **Preservation of Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage**

Soroptimist International supports both the United Nations World Decade for Cultural Development, which urges governments to recognise and implement an integrated strategy for the preservation and protection of cultural resources, including living languages, all forms of art and historical sites and monuments, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, adopted in Rio in 1992, which aims to preserve natural heritage.

Soroptimist International believes that the cultural and natural heritage, which form a basis for communities and is a distinguishing characteristic of each national culture, should be preserved and protected to form a collective memory, which allows people to communicate and to work and live together in mutual tolerance.

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- respect and protect values inherent in the cultural heritage of all races, indigenous people and ethnic groups within each community
- respect natural heritage by protecting landscapes, flora and fauna
- encourage heritage education
- provide legal protection, at all levels, for the preservation of cultural, historic and natural heritage which is, or could be, threatened by environmental, social or economic pressures and above all by armed conflicts
- encourage the peaceful coexistence of different cultures within society
- develop education programmes to increase public awareness of, and sensitivity to, the values inherent in the cultural, historical and natural heritage of all races and ethnic groups
- encourage and educate young people especially, to respect and tolerate the diversity of different cultural and historical heritage within the framework of multiculturalism

Soroptimist International will work to promote the contribution by women, as managers and conservers of cultural, historical and natural heritage and, in partnership with other non-governmental and appropriate agencies, will monitor the actions of governments and other responsible bodies.

*References: 1992 Agenda 21, Sec. II, Chapter 15 World Heritage <http://www.unesco.org/whc>*

## **Protection of Mountain Ecosystems**

Soroptimist International recognises:

- the uniqueness of mountain ecosystems throughout the world which are an important source of water, energy and biological diversity, minerals, forests, agriculture products and recreation
- the fragility of the environment at high altitudes which is susceptible to natural disasters accelerated soil erosion, landslides, rapid loss of habitat and genetic diversity
- the special needs of the inhabitants, who may suffer widespread poverty, unemployment, poor health, inadequate sanitation and loss of indigenous knowledge
- the particular stress, especially in narrow valleys, of environmental aggression produced by transit traffic and disrespectful tourism

Soroptimist International therefore urges all governments to:

- ratify and implement all relevant existing international and regional treaties, conventions and protocols that protect mountains, including the local Agenda 21 programme
- create regional, national and international databases necessary to the sustainable development of mountain ecosystems
- develop appropriate land-use planning and management for both arable and non-arable land, habitat, industry, tourism and traffic routes, assuring economic development while maintaining the quality of the environment and the ecological balance
- give particular attention to transit traffic through crucial areas, reducing the long-distance movements of lorries by a rational production and conditioning system of goods and a transfer to the railway
- improve co-ordination of regional efforts
- create natural reserves and national parks to preserve threatened areas, protect wildlife and conserve biological diversity

- provide incentives to local people for the use and transfer of environmentally friendly farming, forestry, horticulture and animal-husbandry methods
- diversify mountain economy by creating and/or strengthening tourism, in respect to the ecological characteristics of the environment
- improve infrastructure and social services in order to protect the livelihood of local communities and indigenous people
- undertake the above activities in accordance with the wishes and for the profit of the local populations, taking into account especially, the needs of women and promoting their full participation in all schemes

Soroptimist International encourages its members, as inhabitants of or visitors to mountainous regions, to participate in local planning and managing activities, particularly in the local Agenda 21 –programme, to assist in the education of all users of this ecosystem, to respect the peculiarities of the area and to be aware, especially as tourists, of the fragility of the ecosystem and to behave in accordance with this.

*References: 1992 UNCED Agenda 21, Sect II, Chapter 13  
1998 Soroptimist International of Europe, International Seminar on the Alps, Interlaken, Switzerland*

## **Racial Discrimination**

Soroptimist International believes that discrimination between human beings on the grounds of race, colour, or ethnic origin is an offence to human dignity and should be condemned as a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. As stated in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights such discrimination is an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations among nations and capable of disturbing peace and security among peoples.

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- demonstrate the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in all legislation, in justice systems and in employment, education and all social policies
- work for the prevention and elimination of acts of racial discrimination
- ensure protection for people who are victims of, or vulnerable to, such discrimination
- assist migrant peoples to integrate into their adopted country while still maintaining their own cultural identity

Soroptimist International works to promote friendship and understanding between peoples of all races and nationalities and joins with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations, UN agencies and others, to influence governments to eliminate racism and racial discrimination.

Soroptimist International supports the Decade for the World's Indigenous Peoples 1994-2004 and welcomes initiatives to build bridges between indigenous people and the wider community, so that all people can live and work as equals.

*References: United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948  
Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1997*

## Refugees

### Preamble:

Article I of the 1951 United Nations Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as 'a person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well founded fear of being persecuted for race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group or political opinion, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country or to return there for fear of persecution'.

Soroptimist International is also concerned for and would advocate for formal refugee status for

- Communities who migrate from their homelands and cross national borders owing to natural disasters and/or famine
- People who are displaced from their habitual residence within their own national borders as a result of internal conflict and violations of human rights
- Asylum seekers and stateless persons
- Women and girls who flee from their countries because of well-founded fears of gender related persecution

Soroptimist International recognises that this is an international problem of monumental proportions requiring cross border co-operation and burden sharing and is committed to the need to find lasting solutions to forced displacement.

Soroptimist International believes that United Nations personnel and aid agencies should accept responsibility for the care and protection of those people displaced by civil unrest, conflict and human rights abuses within their own countries. Furthermore, our members support the concept of a properly funded and specially trained United Nations fast reaction unit to be deployed swiftly to areas threatened by internal conflict, to act as peace makers and to negotiate and defuse such situations.

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- Sign, ratify and implement those international treaties that have a bearing on refugees\*
- Develop international strategies to support refugees and their host countries
- Provide swift and equitable processes for the recognition of refugee status
- Uphold the basic rights of refugees to the protection of law, to food and shelter, health care and education, employment, access to legal aid and identity documents, freedom of religion, travel and use of their mother tongue
- Allow refugee aid agencies unconditional access to refugee camps and centres
- Provide protection and a safe environment for vulnerable refugee women, girls and children, the elderly and the handicapped
- Facilitate the willing return of refugees to their homeland whilst upholding the principle of non-refoulement

Soroptimist International will co-operate with governments and civil society in identifying the causes of injustice, persecution and intolerance. Our members will advocate and promote policies and practices that will build communities based on acceptance and respect for different races, cultures, religions, sexual orientation and disabilities.

\*  
1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees  
1967 Protocol to the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees  
Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination  
Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women  
Convention against Torture

Convention on the Rights of the Child  
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights  
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Research documents:

1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees

1967 Protocol to the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

The State of the World's Refugees (UNHCR)

Refugees in the Age of Genocide: Kushner and Knox

UNHCR: Guidelines on International Protection: Gender-Related Persecution within the context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees

## **Rights of the Child**

Soroptimist International believes that the world's children are entitled to special care and assistance. It recognises the importance of international co-operation for establishing and implementing the rights, and improving the living conditions of children in every country, particularly in the developing countries. It is committed to the principle, that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child should be the primary consideration.

Soroptimist International believes that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is correct in emphasising the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents, or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or the community, to provide the direction and guidance which enable the child to exercise the rights recognised in the Convention.

Soroptimist International further believes the Convention is correct in laying duties on the State and therefore urges the governments of all countries to:

- ratify and implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- develop legislation and programmes aimed at the eradication of the exploitation of children
- provide education for all children
- provide adequate food, clean water, shelter and a safe environment
- protect children against physical, sexual or emotional abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation
- promote their physical and psychological health and welfare
- forbid exploitative child labour
- administer adequate juvenile justice
- have particular care for children who live on the streets, for refugees and victims of war
- prevent forced conscription into war
- co-operate internationally, sharing resources, to fulfil their commitment to supporting the rights of children everywhere

Soroptimist International will work in partnership with governments, with other non-governmental organisations and with UN agencies, to provide technical assistance, monitoring and research of all programmes involving children to ensure compliance with laws and with the United Nations Convention.

*References:*     *The Progress of Nations - published by UNICEF 1997*  
                      *1995, Platform For Action, Section K*  
                      *1989, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*

## **The Rights of the Girl Child**

In recognising the rights of the child as paramount, Soroptimist International has particular concern for the rights of the girl child and fully supports the statements contained in the Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, in 1995 and in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Soroptimist International is concerned about all forms of violence against girls, particularly sexual violence, including rape, sexual exploitation, trafficking, pornography and in the commercial sex industry. Sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS have a devastating effect on children's health and girls are often victims because of:

- pressures to engage in sexual activity
- social pressures related to their youth
- lack of protective laws or failure to enforce them
- constant reinforcement of their worthlessness in the family and in society
- being compelled into early marriage or forced into sexual activity for profit
- negative portrayal in the media (including advertising)

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- fulfil their commitment to International Conventions, treaties and agreements, by the development and implementation of appropriate laws that guarantee the protection of girls from abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect
- ensure equal access for girls to education and training, especially to scientific and technological training and education
- forbid exploitative child labour
- provide educational programmes to help prevent early marriages and teenage pregnancies
- provide support services for teenage mothers to learn parenting skills, to continue education and training, to enable them to contribute to their own and their children's future in society
- strengthen the role of the family and improve the status of the girl child within the family
- eliminate barriers which prevent girls developing to their full potential
- ensure that the girl child is not exploited in the media (including advertising)
- ensure that the aggregation of statistical information is gender-related

Soroptimist International pledges its members to work for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against the girl child, including harmful attitudes and traditional practices, sexual exploitation and abuse, which define her gender as second class within the family and in society

Soroptimist International believes that education of the girl child is the key to progress and will work in partnership with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations and related UN agencies, locally, and internationally, to realise this aim.

*Reference: Platform for Action 1995 - K*

## **Rights of the Older Person**

In recognising 1999 as the United Nations International Year of the Older Person, Soroptimist International is aware that the ageing community is the fastest growing group in the world. Chronological age is no longer considered a determinant of individual capacity and capability, because people, and more particularly women, are living longer and more productively than ever before. However, although the majority of older persons continue to live vital, healthy lives, within the family, the risk of dependency must increase with age.

Soroptimist International therefore urges Governments to:

- make urgent plans and provision for this ageing population, including them in the development of policies and programmes, and decisions, on all issues which will affect their lives
- recognise that older persons have a wealth of lifelong experiences and are an untapped resource in society
- offer opportunities for older people to remain integrated in society and to develop new social roles.
- provide appropriate opportunities for work with adequate pension and social security schemes
- ensure adequate resources to meet basic needs, to be provided by their own income, the family and community support
- provide health care throughout the life cycle to help the older person maintain, or return to, an optimum level of physical, mental and emotional well-being
  
- support the potential to remain in their own homes by offering appropriate housing that can be adapted to suit their changing needs
- assist in the provision of flexible working arrangements for those who become the carers of incapacitated older persons
- improve the working conditions of those who work in the caring professions
- honour the older person's dignity by offering security and protection from exploitation and physical, mental or verbal abuse
- conduct gender specific research into the health and sociological issues of the ageing population

Soroptimist International will work as partners with governments and civil societies, ensuring the protection of their rights and supporting investment in our older persons, as valuable resources to future generations.

*References: Platform For Action, 1995  
Elderly Women, by Jeannine Jacquemin NGO-UNESCO Working Group  
Expert Group Meeting on Care Giving for Elder Persons, Malta, 1997  
UN NGO Committee on Ageing Fact Sheet, 1998*

## **Rights of the Single Parent Family**

Soroptimist International has concerns for the parents (male or female) who for reasons often beyond their control are left without the support of partner or extended family. It is concerned about the discrimination often encountered by single parents and the subsequent adverse effects this may have on the children. It advocates the recognition of the single parent family as a family unit with the right to receive and enjoy the same facilities and benefits as those of the two parent family.

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- establish and maintain the requisite networks - including employment assistance, day care, health care and legal assistance - which will enable a parent to cope with child care and crisis care to the benefit of both parents and children
- provide the same support as to the two parent families, thus allowing a family unit to be established and to develop in the best interests of the parent and the children

## **Safe Motherhood- 2006 Revision**

Soroptimist International is aware that more than 500,000\*\* women die as the result of pregnancy and childbirth and that millions more will become ill or disabled. Therefore, Soroptimist International supports the work of the World Health Organization to improve maternal health and make pregnancy safer.

Soroptimist International recognises that the Forward Looking Strategies developed as an outcome of the UN Decade for Women Conference in 1985; the Platform for Action adopted at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and reconfirmed at the 2005 UN Commission on the Status of Women; the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo 1994 all make a broad range of recommendations on these topics. Soroptimist International also supports the UN Millennium Development Goal adopted in 2000 and reconfirmed at the 2005 UN World Summit to reduce maternal mortality by 75 percent from 1990 levels by 2015.

SI therefore urges all governments to support these goals by

- ensuring access to all forms of health care
- improving national healthcare infrastructures so that pregnancy and childbirth become safer
- allocating sufficient resources to maternity services including training of hospital and community personnel
- promoting education on the human reproduction system, contraception, the importance of family planning and parenting skills
- educating on nutrition and a healthy lifestyle
- improving rural health facilities
- integrating traditional birth attendants into the regular pattern of pre- and post-natal care
- encouraging and supporting initiatives by relevant voluntary organisations
- encouraging research into causes and possible solutions of maternal mortality and into the monitoring of interventions to identify effective procedures
- improving post-partum care and access to fistula repair surgery
- improving post natal care including the treatment of post natal depression
- supporting international health care NGOs and programmes to increase and improve pre and post-natal health care.

Soroptimist International members will work with non-governmental, voluntary and other organisations to monitor the implementation of commitments made by governments and professional agencies in these matters. In particular they will support the participation of women at all levels in policy-making, programme formulation and implementation.

*\*\* World Health Organization: MDG #5 website 2006*

## **Sustainable Development and Environment**

Soroptimist International recognises the widespread environmental degradation which threatens the planet and all its life forms, as well as the need for continued development and social welfare and endorses the principle of sustainable development as conceived by the World Commission on Environment and Development, launched at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio 1992 and supervised by the UN Commission for Sustainable Development.

Soroptimist International urges all governments to co-operate to:

- adopt policies of development that will provide a better quality of life for all people in the present generation, without endangering the lives of future ones

- develop education programmes that increase awareness of the mechanisms that rule the economy and ecology of the world
- encourage the modification of attitudes and lifestyles to help maintain the ecological balance for the survival of the planet
- mainstream the principle of sustainable development in all relevant policies
- create a more equitable sharing of all resources and work to eliminate poverty, which is the environment's worst enemy

Soroptimist International believes that each person has a responsibility for environmental degradation and must consider the environmental impact of their own actions in their business, professional and personal lives. It therefore asks its members, in their roles of consumers, producers, managers and conservers of natural resources and environmental quality, and working as equal partners with men, in the environment and development decision making process, to:

- increase their own awareness of the economy and ecology of the world
- examine their own attitudes and lifestyles and their impact on the environment
- strive by advocacy and action for a sustainable environment within the framework of the decisions agreed at the World Conferences in Rio in 1992 and Beijing in 1995
- assist and support the development of less privileged regions in accordance with the principles of sustainability
- work in partnership with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations, to ensure the commitment of governments to the protection of the planet by sustainable development

*References:* 1992 Agenda 21  
 1995: Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women  
 Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) <http://www.un.org/dpcsd>

## **Terrorism**

Soroptimist International is committed to the attainment of world peace by mutual understanding, patient negotiation and non-violent methods of conflict resolution. It considers acts of terrorism to be inhuman, unacceptable, and a gross violation of human rights.

Soroptimist International believes that terrorism:

- victimises innocent civilians and costs the lives of men, women and children, who are not actively involved in a conflict
- breeds hostility and hatred between people
- undermines civil society
- threatens the territorial integrity and security of states and creates conflict between them
- causes forced migrations, the primary sufferers of which are women and children
- creates adverse consequences on economic and social development
- feeds on illegal trafficking of arms and narcotics

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- condemn as a common crime all forms of terrorism
- take immediate, effective measures to prevent and combat terrorist activities
- fulfil their obligations under international law
- prevent their territories from being used for terrorist activities against other states
- co-operate internationally for the speedy and final elimination of terrorism

Soroptimist International will work sensitively with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations, with the UN and other appropriate agencies in the pursuit of world peace and the elimination of acts of terrorism.

*References: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 Article 30  
UN General Assembly Resolutions: 48/122, 49/185, 49/60, 50/186; 34/145, 38/130, 40/61, 42/159, 44/29,  
46/51  
Madrid Document, 1983                      Stockholm Conference, 1986  
Vienna Document, 1989  
Charter of Paris for a New Europe, 1990; Vienna Declaration, June 1993, para. 1*

## **Tobacco and Women's Health**

Soroptimist International is gravely concerned that the use of tobacco is a worldwide public health disaster for society and for women and girls in particular.

Soroptimist International recognises the urgency of finding comprehensive solutions to:

- the disabling health problems caused by tobacco
- the impact upon reproductive health
- increased morbidity rates

Soroptimist International is aware of the need for a continuing and strengthened focus on programmes of collaboration, co-operation and intervention, including gender specific tobacco control strategies.

Soroptimist International welcomes the report of the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s International Conference on Tobacco and Health, Kobe, November 1999 and the results of the 11<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Tobacco and Health in Chicago, in August 2000. Its members fully support the WHO 'Tobacco Free Initiative'.

Soroptimist International calls upon all member states to ratify the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and its related protocols without reservations.

Soroptimist International supports local, national and global programmes and practical policies which: -

- reinforce all conventional prevention strategies
- ban the tobacco industry's direct and indirect advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco across all media, especially those which target women and girls
- develop gender specific strategies to reduce tobacco initiation and use
- increase resources for investigative research into the effects of tobacco usage by women and girls and ensure that the results are widely disseminated
- invest in effective health education and information at formal and non-formal levels to empower women and girls in the fight against tobacco
- prevent the sale of gutkha, paan marsala and other tobacco sweets and tobacco products to children
- provide alternatives to the production of tobacco crops

Soroptimist International upholds the principle of the fundamental human right of health for all women and girls. It pledges to co-operate fully with the World Health Organisation in developing and disseminating:

- materials and guidelines for best practice in combating tobacco usage, particularly amongst rural, indigenous and low-income women and girls in countries in transition
- resource lists of web-based programmes and materials to educate women and girls about the health hazards associated with tobacco usage and environmental tobacco smoke

Soroptimist International will join with other non-governmental organisations in monitoring media promotion by the tobacco industry, raising public awareness of the dangers of all forms of tobacco usage, advocating for greater tobacco control and initiating actions locally, nationally and globally to support smoking cessation.

### **Traditional Practices Adversely Affecting Women and Children**

Soroptimist International is concerned that the effects of traditional practices, which exist as a result of the combination of deeply-rooted psychological, sexual, religious, cultural and psycho-sexual beliefs, are known to have damaging effects on the mental and physical health of millions of women and children.

These practices include:

- genital mutilation
- facial scarification
- the forced feeding of women
- child marriage, forced marriage
- the various taboos and practices which prevent women from controlling their own fertility
- nutritional taboos
- traditional practices relating to childbirth
- certain dowry systems
- treatment of brides (bride burning)
- 'crimes of honour'
- son preference
- treatment of widows

Soroptimist International believes that these are violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It urges its members to:

- become informed about traditional practices and their harmful effect on women and children
- work with the women of affected communities towards the eradication of these practices
- support appropriate education programmes within these communities
- encourage the participation of women in the decision making process for the improvement of their health and well-being and that of their daughters

With the approval of Soroptimists in these communities, Soroptimist International will work to convince governments to forbid, by law, these harmful traditional practices and will follow closely the implementation of such laws once passed.

*References: Platform for Action, 1995*

### **Trafficking - Revised 2006**

Soroptimist International is gravely concerned about the devastating global increase in trafficking of human beings, especially women and children and condemns this trans-national crime which is a gross violation of human rights.

Soroptimist International fully supports the United Nations Convention against Trans-national Crime and its Protocol on Trafficking. It accepts the definition of trafficking as defined by the United Nations 'Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and

Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Trans-national Organised Crime', *Article 3\**.

Soroptimist International also supports the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), *Article 6*.

Soroptimist International urges governments to ratify and implement these and all other instruments, which address trafficking for sexual exploitation and trafficking of human beings for slavery. Soroptimist International further urges governments to reconsider their legislations and to establish comprehensive policies, educational programmes and other measures that

- inform and educate the community at all levels
- identify and eliminate the root causes of trafficking
- provide victims of trafficking with assistance to prosecute their perpetrators and to obtain redress and restitution
- afford protection to victims, witnesses and their families
- ensure refuge, asylum and protection for those who are victims of trafficking
- support and rehabilitate trafficked victims, by the provision of appropriate housing, medical and psychological counselling and information regarding legal rights, education, employment and training opportunities, in the victim's own language
- insist that all people who provide services to victims are appropriately screened
- promote gender sensitivity in all aspects of victim support
- penalise severely those who benefit from the trafficking of human beings

Recognising that trafficking is a major part of trans-national organised crime and that this has become too wide for single governments to fight, Soroptimist International urges total international co-operation in bringing the perpetrators to justice. There should be completely open and honest exchange of information and standardisation of criminal justice systems.

Soroptimist International is committed to

- identifying, convicting and punishing the perpetrators
- assisting the victims to regain their physical and mental health, their dignity and rightful place in society
- raising community awareness and changing attitudes through social education and health services
- working closely with all levels of law enforcement
- working in partnership with governments, with other non-governmental organisations, with UN Agencies and other appropriate bodies to eradicate the scourge of trafficking.

*References:*

- The Slavery Convention (1953)*
- Dhaka Declaration (1998)*
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*
- International Labour Organisation Convention*
- United Nations Convention against Trans-national Organised Crime*
- United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Trans-national Organised Crime*
- The 'Natasha Trade' – The Trans-national Shadow Market of Trafficking of Women (Hughes 2000)*

*\*Article 3:*

*The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Trans-national Organised Crime. Article 3 reads as follows-*

- (a) *'Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a*

*minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.*

- (b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in paragraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used.*
- (c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered 'trafficking in persons' even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article*
- (d) 'Child' shall mean any person under eighteen years of age*

## **The Transport by Sea of Potentially Hazardous Cargo**

Soroptimist International is gravely concerned by the increase in disasters at sea involving cargo, which, although not necessarily in itself a danger, when leaked into the sea, becomes the cause of major pollution. Such cargo includes oil (crude and refined), arms, nuclear waste, medical supplies and chemicals.

Transporting potentially hazardous cargo inevitably carries many risks and when a disaster occurs, the cost to marine life and to coastal waters and beaches is immense. The subsequent economic and environmental cost is immeasurable and in many parts of the world this cost impacts especially on women.

The problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and with the increase in shipping these problems are increased. An internationally agreed legal order for the seas and oceans facilitates international communication, promotes the peaceful uses of the seas and oceans, the equitable and efficient use of their resources and protects the study, conservation and preservation of the marine environment.

Soroptimist International fully supports the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which was opened in Montego Bay, Jamaica in December 1982 and brought into force in 1994 and recognises that when this law is followed correctly, the likelihood of an accident is rare. However, many disasters result from the failure to adhere to this Convention.

Inquiries following disasters often reveal:

- unseaworthy ships
- inadequate registration
- inexperienced crews
- language problems on board and in ship to shore communications
- insufficient training for emergencies on board and on shore

Soroptimist International therefore advocates that the governments of all countries urgently implement the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and in particular those clauses which require that they:

- inspect all vessels regularly, ensuring the highest seaworthiness before they can put to sea.
- ensure that no rogue traders can transport potentially hazardous cargo
- allow only fully trained personnel to operate the vessels and ensure that they have the necessary language for the journey.
- provide adequate resources for immediate rescue and clean up operations.
- impose severe penalties on those who ignore the law on the transport of potentially hazardous cargo.

Soroptimist International urges its members to work with all appropriate agencies to monitor the response of governments to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and to raise awareness of both the danger to marine and coastal life from the transportation of potentially

hazardous cargo and the negative impact that disasters at sea may have on the economic and social lives of many women.

## **Violence against Women and Girls**

Soroptimist International believes that violence of any kind is an intolerable act. In particular, Soroptimist International condemns the use and/or threat of all violence against women in the home, at work, in the community or even in war, believing that acts of violence endanger women physically, mentally, emotionally and economically, perpetuating and reinforcing unjustifiable inequalities in all aspects of women's lives.

Soroptimist International supports the strategic objectives stated in the Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and urges governments to do their utmost to secure the safety of girls and women from acts of violence, and to help them overcome the consequences, when violence does occur, by:

- ensuring that the agencies of law enforcement have adequate resources and appropriate training to offer assistance to women who are the victims of domestic violence
- patrolling public places and streets effectively at all times, and responding quickly to calls for assistance against violence
- acting with understanding and sympathy at all times
- informing women about their legal rights and the sources of help
- ensuring that legal services, the judicial system and support services are available, and that these operate speedily and effectively and, where possible, without cost for women who have suffered violence
- providing assistance to leave the place where violence occurs and, in particular, promoting the provision of refuges and safe houses for women who are victims of domestic violence and their children, including migrant, disabled and indigenous women
- providing access to medical and psychological services, counselling and legal aid, at no cost to the victim.

Soroptimist International also urges Governments to take further action designed to overcome the possibility of and/or the effects of violence by:

- promoting arrangements to ensure the protection of workers from violence and exploitation in the workplace and providing safe transport
- ensuring that effective arrangements are made to promote safety from acts of violence to users of public transport
- promoting penal systems which combine protection of society, from those who carry out acts of violence, with punishment of the perpetrators and their rehabilitation and education
- introducing and enforcing legislation which makes unlawful the customs, religious and traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, "crimes of honour", bride burning, forced abortion and other practices that violate the rights of women and girls
- ensuring that all women in prison, or other institutions, are afforded their human rights, protected from acts of violence, and treated with dignity and respect
- arranging for the counselling and rehabilitation of the victims of violence (including training and job finding where appropriate)
- creating or strengthening mechanisms so that women and girls can report acts of violence in a safe and confidential environment
- supporting gender specific research into the causes of violent behaviour and remedial techniques, disseminating the results and acting upon the recommendations
- developing education programmes, which include teaching young people to value men and women equally, and to understand the concept of non-violent resolution of conflicts among themselves

- raising awareness of the responsibility of the media in promoting non-stereotyped images of women and men, and eliminating media presentations that generate violence
- developing education programmes and legislation, aimed at eliminating trafficking of women and children, child pornography, and sex tourism
- encouraging the participation of women who have suffered violence, in all strategy development and implementation

Soroptimist International works to prevent and reduce violence against women and to help the victims, and advocates co-operation among governments, non-governmental and voluntary organisations in this work.

*References:*

*Forward Looking Strategies 1985 adopted by the UN General Assembly in Resolution No. 40/108 Platform for Action 1995, Critical Area D,D1,D2,D3,124,125.a,125.j 129,130.e*

## **Waste Management**

Soroptimist International recognises that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption are increasing the quantities and variety of environmentally persistent wastes at an unprecedented rate and supports a preventive waste management approach, focused on changes in lifestyle, in production and consumption patterns.

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- extend waste-service coverage to all settlements and people
- minimise wastes by stabilising or reducing the production of wastes, by formulating goals based on weight, volume and composition and by introducing separation operations to facilitate waste recycling and reuse
- promote environmentally-sound waste disposal
- establish waste disposal quality criteria in conformity with national or international environmental and health quality guidelines
- seek waste disposal solutions within the sovereign territory and as close as possible to the sources of origin
- maximise environmentally-sound waste reuse and recycling
- encourage and make operational waste reducing, reusing and recycling schemes and develop public education programmes in waste management
- promote the use of recycled products
- develop and strengthen national capacities in research and design of sound technologies and transfer them if necessary
- provide incentives to reduce unsustainable patterns of production and consumption

Soroptimist International asks its members to work with other non-governmental and voluntary organisations and appropriate agencies to apply environmentally and hygienically sound waste management principles in their professional and private lives and to develop public education and awareness programmes among producers and consumers, especially women and young people.

*References:*

*1992 Agenda 21, section II, Chapter 21  
1996 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul  
<http://www.unhabitat.org>*

## **Women as Business Owners**

Soroptimist International fully supports the objective in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, which urges governments of all nations to promote and support women's self employment.

It endorses the right of women to become entrepreneurs, recognising that they are an essential production force in all economies. It is essential that women, many of whom are the sole earners within the family unit, be supported in their efforts to improve their own position in life and that of their families.

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- adopt policies and regulations which promote opportunities for micro, small and medium scale enterprises run by women in rural and urban areas
- promote and support women's self-employment and the development of small enterprises
- strengthen women's access to credit and capital including non-traditional and mutual credit schemes, as well as innovative links with financial institutions
- establish mechanisms and fora to enable women entrepreneurs to contribute to the formulation of policies and programmes being developed by economic ministries and financial institutions
- mobilise the banking sector to increase lending and refinancing through incentives and the development of intermediaries, which serve the needs of women entrepreneurs in both rural and urban areas, and include women in their leadership, planning and decision making
- ensure that entrepreneurship goes hand in hand with increased security and social protection

Soroptimist International advocates that financial intermediaries, credit unions, non-governmental organisations, women's associations, professional organisations and the private sector support and encourage women who start their own businesses by:

- assisting in the development of education, finance, marketing opportunities and technical guidance programmes for them
- providing adequate support for programmes and projects designed to promote sustainable and productive entrepreneurial activities among women, especially the disadvantaged
- promoting and strengthening women's micro enterprises, new small businesses and co-operative enterprises
- investing capital and developing investment portfolios to finance women's business enterprises
- supporting credit networks and innovative ventures, including traditional saving schemes
- encouraging community organisations and public authorities to establish loan 'pools' for women entrepreneurs
- providing networking arrangements for entrepreneurial women, including opportunities for the mentoring of inexperienced women by the more experienced

Soroptimist International will work with other appropriate organisations for the realisation of these aims.

*References: Platform for Action 1995: F2; F2a; P. 99 (m); F2 p.101; F2 p. 102; F4 p. 105; F4 p. 105; F4 p 105j*

## **Women as Decision Makers**

Soroptimist International fully supports the development of women as decision makers and seeks to remove the obstacles that impede the advancement of the status of women.

Soroptimist International recognises that:

- equality in decision making is essential to the empowerment of women
- women have always been substantial decision-makers in the areas of primary production and domestic organisation
- women have demonstrated considerable leadership in community and professional organisations, as well as in public and political office
- women are under-represented at executive levels of decision making in government, non-governmental and corporate organisations
- the low proportion of women among economic and political decision makers is the result of both attitudinal and institutional barriers
- equality in decision making is essential to the equitable and sustainable development of global resources

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- take a leading role in promoting the policy of mainstreaming by establishing gender balance in government bodies and committees, in public administration and the judiciary
- set specific targets and timelines and implement measures to increase substantially the number of women in decision making positions
- encourage greater involvement of indigenous and ethnic minority women in decision making at all levels
- support non-governmental organisations and research institutes that conduct studies on women's participation in and impact on, decision-making and the decision-making environment

Soroptimist International also urges governments, in partnership with national bodies, the private sector, non-governmental and international organisations to:

- take positive action to build a critical mass of competent women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions
- create or strengthen, as appropriate, mechanisms to monitor women's access to senior levels of decision-making
- increase women's participation in and access to decision making in the media and new technologies of communication
- review the criteria for recruitment and appointment to advisory and decision-making bodies and promotion to senior positions, to ensure that such criteria are relevant and do not discriminate against women

Soroptimist International will work with other appropriate organisations for the realisation of these aims.

*Reference: Platform for Action 1995: pg11, Gi, G2, Gi-f, Para 192 a, Para 192b, Para 192c*

## Women in International Migration

Soroptimist International endorses the right of voluntary movement, believing that migration should stimulate, rather than hold back, personal and national development.

Migration and the international flow of labour and skills can contribute to economic development and reduce imbalances in labour markets, bringing potential benefits to countries of origin and destination. However, the increasing migration pressures resulting from poverty, armed conflict, environmental degradation and rapid population growth engender the risk of uncontrolled, mass migration with negative human, social and economic consequences, for both.

Soroptimist International therefore advocates co-operative migration strategies which ensure:

- a policy of sustainable development in all countries, taking into consideration the linkage of economic growth, environment and migration
- international co-operation in development policies which give priority to investment in labour intensive industries, and to the promotion of world trade which does not conflict with the national development policies of individual countries
- the protection of the rights of migrant workers, their families and in particular women
- the economic and social integration of migrants within their host countries

Soroptimist International is especially concerned about the situation of women, who represent nearly 50% of international migrants, and urges governments to:

- reduce the need for migration by the improvement of equal economic and employment opportunities and the provision of equal opportunities for education and training
- disseminate information about trends of labour markets and requirements for residence and work permits
- strengthen their policies, aiming at controlled migration
- revise international migration legislation and regulations that result in discriminatory practices against female migrants
- prevent and eliminate unlawful or clandestine movements and the employment of migrant women in an illegal situation
- protect women against exploitation, physical, mental and sexual harassment and abuse, including coerced prostitution
- ensure equal treatment of migrant women at the workplace
- grant women equal access to educational institutions, vocational guidance and training, and accept cross-border, cross-national qualifications or facilitate professional re-qualification, in their country of adoption
- facilitate learning of the local language, to enable participation in the social and cultural life of the host countries
- include migrant women in consultation, participation in decision making, and in the development and implementation of programmes designed to benefit them, both in the workplace and in the community

Working in partnership with governments, non-governmental organisations and other relevant agencies, Soroptimist International will strive for the realisation of these aims, monitoring their progress in national legislation and implementation.

*References: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. UNFPA The State of World Population 1993*

## **Women and Poverty - Revised 2006**

Soroptimist International recognizes that women suffer the effects of poverty more profoundly than men, and that worldwide, more women live in poverty than men. Soroptimist International fully supports the statements in reference to poverty contained in the Platform for Action, adopted at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and reconfirmed at the 2005 UN Commission on the Status of Women; the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and most profoundly the UN Millennium Development Goals which seek to end extreme poverty by 2015. Soroptimist International believes that the Millennium Development Goals are not achievable without a focus on ending the poverty of women.

The causes of poverty are complex and influenced by national and international conditions, including economics, war, trade, natural disasters, debt, migration, health care and a multitude of social issues. Soroptimist International recognizes that the solutions to poverty are equally complex and to be successful, all issues contributing to poverty must be addressed.

In order to end the poverty of women, Soroptimist International urges governments to

- uphold the promises and fulfil the commitments made at the 2000 United Nation's Millennium Summit to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015
- ensure women have equal access to resources, wealth and opportunities
- empower impoverished women by including them in the review, revision and creation of governmental anti-poverty policies
- promote economic opportunities for women
- guarantee that all children, especially girls, have access to primary education
- develop education programmes for women, to include literacy, employment training, life skills and the building of self confidence
- make available financial resources to women, including bank loans and saving schemes
- provide affordable housing for women, access to land and ensured inheritance rights
- guarantee adequate and equal access to health care and recognize the special needs of women in health care, including HIV/AIDS
- value the work of women as caregivers to children, to older people, people with disabilities and the sick and to distribute resources accordingly
- ensure the human rights of all women, including migrants, and ensure their protection against violence and exploitation
- recognize and support the special needs of the young, of older people, people with disabilities and to provide education and work programmes which address their special needs
- encourage gender-based research into the causes and solutions of poverty; to disseminate the results and act on the recommendations
- ensure pay equity for men and women
- work with governments, NGOs and the United Nations to ensure the success of the Millennium Development Goals

Soroptimist International will work to end poverty and will co-operate with other non-government and voluntary organizations to monitor governments' implementation of anti - poverty programmes which target women and children.

## **Women in Social and Economic Development**

Soroptimist International believes that all people have a right to and a responsibility for development and fully supports the objectives of the Charter of the United Nations, as stated in Article 55 - "to promote higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development".

Soroptimist International further supports the Platform for Action agreed at the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995 and endorses the principles of sustainable human development.

Soroptimist International emphasises:

- the interdependence of economic growth and social progress
- the inter-relationship between development, human rights and peace
- that economic growth must benefit all people
- the need to eradicate poverty by the creation of productive employment opportunities, especially in income generating projects which enable women and their families to become self-sufficient
- the need to integrate women and disadvantaged people into all phases of the process of development
- that development must aim at a balance between economic efficiency, social justice and a sustainable environment
- that the use of technology plays a vital part in the development of any country but it must be related to the needs of people

Soroptimist International will work with governments, non-governmental and other appropriate agencies to encourage the empowerment of women to participate in all decision making relating to social and economic development.

## **Youth**

Soroptimist International fully supports the objectives in the "World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and Beyond" as adopted in 1995 as an international strategy by the General Assembly of the UN.

Soroptimist International believes that the imagination, ideals and energies of youth ages 15-24 are vital for the continuing development of the societies in which they live. Their problems, vision and aspirations are essential parts of the challenges facing today's societies and that of future generations.

Soroptimist International urges governments to:

- act to eliminate discrimination against youth particularly girls and young women,
- promote development of skills for effective participation in society by education in their human rights and responsibilities,
- encourage the social, political, and environmental participation of youth,
- allow the full and effective participation of youth in decision-making,
- legislate to protect youth from forced military service, unsuitable working conditions, sexual exploitation and abuse.

Soroptimist International further urges governments to:

- provide or improve the level of basic education and skills, vocational and professional training with emphasis on new technologies,
- create opportunities for employment, especially for those most disadvantaged by poverty, disability, and refugee status,

- encourage life in agricultural areas by ensuring youth in both urban and rural areas have access to education, employment and leisure opportunities,
- establish non-discriminatory, affordable high quality health care services including sexual and reproductive health,
- provide advice, information, counselling and preventative programmes on sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and HIV/AIDS, drug, alcohol, tobacco and other substance abuse, encouraging participation of young people in such programmes,
- provide health care for young substance abusers in the criminal justice and prison system,
- strengthen the participation of youth in the protection, preservation and improvement of the environment and encourage the introduction of environmental education and training,
- implement programmes addressing root causes of criminality in youth,
- increase their awareness of the effects of violence,
- teach the principles of mutual respect and understanding, with the ideals of peace and solidarity, emphasising cultural heritage.

Soroptimist International will:

- foster national and international understanding and co-operation between young people through exchange programmes, cultural events, and sport,
- work with governments, youth organisations, educational institutions, other non-governmental organisations, UN agencies and other relevant bodies to promote the solution to youth problems and to raise their status with awareness, advocacy and action.

In support of UN International Youth Day, August 12, Soroptimist International will organize activities to promote awareness, especially among youth, of the "World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond."

*References: UN World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond - March 1996  
UN Youth Agenda - November 1997  
UN Youth Unit - World Youth News - 1999 - No. 16*