

a global voice
for women

Soroptimist  International

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

OF

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES of SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL STATEMENTS

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)

Soroptimist International recognises HIV/AIDS to be a global pandemic, threatening human survival, human rights and human development. It has particular concern for the vulnerability of women to this disease, for, as well as being infected themselves, women are the major carers for other infected persons. It recognises also that the pandemic threatens the welfare of children everywhere, especially in the developing countries, by both killing children and by creating orphans.

Recognising that many factors are involved in the spread of this disease, Soroptimist International will work with governments and all appropriate bodies, including the United Nations, UNAID and the World Health Organisation, to encourage a global response to this global problem.

Antarctic Protection

Soroptimist International accepts the importance 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 and associated ecosystems and therefore urges the implementation of the Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty on Environmental Protection and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.

Anti-personnel Landmines

Soroptimist International fully supports the destruction and prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. It 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 and support and contribute to the international fund administered by the United Nations, to promote and finance awareness, clearance and eradication programmes, worldwide.

Arms Limitation/Conflict Resolution

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

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. It

advocates international implementation of the UN Convention on Biodiversity and guidelines on Biosafety.

In particular it urges all governments to develop and implement to safeguard the health and rights of individuals and to ban the production of human beings by cloning or other methods. Soroptimist International is committed to active participation by informed women in decision making at all levels of society regarding biotechnology, biodiversity, bioethics and genetic engineering.

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 both, working together internationally to realise their aims.

Its members will 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.

Development of 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. Recognising that equality in decision making is essential to the empowerment of women and to the equitable and sustainable development of global resources, it urges governments to promote the policy of mainstreaming by establishing gender balance in government bodies and committees, in public administration and the judiciary. In partnership with others they should take positive action to improve women's access to all levels of decision-making and thus build a team of competent women in strategic positions.

Diseases – Emerging and Re-emerging

Soroptimist International recognises the problem of emerging and re-emerging diseases, especially those associated with resistance to treatment. It 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 a global programme for the prevention of these diseases by vaccination/immunisation/preventive medication, by education and by the provision of resources for relevant research.

Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

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 and children. Prevention has become increasingly important because of the escalating cost of health care that could exclude some sections of

the population from receiving adequate health services. It also recognises the growing problem of newly emerging and re-emerging infectious and transmissible diseases.

Soroptimist International urges the provision of adequate resources for gender based research, for the provision of vaccines, drugs, health education, safe water, food and shelter. It will work with the appropriate agencies to ensure these are available to all people.

Drug and Substance Abuse

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. It is 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 and fully supports such global programmes.

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 will work with all appropriate agencies to develop such programmes of education and support at local, national and international levels.

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. 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.

It supports co-operation between governments, civil society and the private sector to assist developing countries to compete globally, to introduce poverty reduction programmes, including the consideration of the cancellation of crippling debt and especially in establishing systems to counteract the negative impacts of economic globalisation upon women and children.

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 in Beijing in 1995 and echoed in the Millennium goals.

It recognises that women contribute to the development and the maintenance of social structure through unpaid labour, which is rarely measured in quantitative terms and is undervalued in national accounts. 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 create more employment opportunities and to develop infrastructures which make it possible for women

to take up these opportunities. It will work with other appropriate organisations to realise these aims.

Energy

Soroptimist International recognises that fossil fuel resources are known to be finite; that the burning of fossil fuels 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. It therefore considers it essential that governments review and revise their energy policies to incorporate energy conservation strategies and develop devices for alternative energy production from renewable resources.

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 energy produced from renewable resources.

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 implementing Agenda 21, priority should be given to the quality of water, air and soil, to biological diversity, to waste management and to the efficient use of energy.

Equality of Access to Education

Soroptimist International is committed to the ideal of equal education opportunities for all throughout life, believing that education is a human right and essential for the achievement of equality, development and peace. It emphasises as a priority, the need for basic literacy and asks that primary education be provided in all countries by 2015.

It urges governments to provide adequate resources for the provision of equal access to education for women and girls, especially to vocational, scientific and continuing education and strongly supports the participation of women at all levels of national policy making, programme formulation and project implementation in the field of education.

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.

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.

It urges governments to 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.

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.

It urges governments to give high priority to reducing female illiteracy as the key to improving education, health and nutrition in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision making and asks that primary education be provided in all countries by 2015.

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. It 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. They should assist migrant people to integrate into their adopted country while maintaining their own cultural identity. Recognising that indigenous people are an inseparable part of the world's cultural heritage, governments should develop initiatives which will help to build bridges between indigenous people and the wider community.

Female Genital Mutilation

Soroptimist International (SI) is concerned that the effects of many harmful practices, which still exist in some countries, have damaging effects on the mental and physical health of millions of women and girls. Of particular concern is the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which is a violation of all Human Rights.

SI supports the WHO and UNICEF's condemnation of the practice of FGM and shares their belief that its elimination will be brought about by education rather than by penal repression. It urges its members to become informed about FGM, to educate themselves and others and to encourage diverse strategies to assist women and girls in those countries where FGM is practised.

SI 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)

Soroptimist International recognises that famine, hunger and food insecurity results from poverty and is itself a cause of poverty. Poverty results from many causes – natural disasters, population growth or displacement, war, the international market, inadequate storage facilities, lack of training in the use of improved agricultural technology, lack of financial resources, and inadequate food distribution even within the framework of humanitarian aid.

It urges governments and all appropriate bodies to implement long term strategies for agricultural development, recognising and facilitating the role of women as equal partners in agricultural development and as food producers. Soroptimist members will use their consumer power to support developing countries and to promote the cause of women in those countries.

Freshwater

Soroptimist International believes that all people have a right to clean, safe drinking water and sanitation and the governments of all countries must co-operate to safeguard this right. It also recognises that access to safe water can be at the origin of struggles between population groups.

Soroptimist International therefore urges governments to implement an integrated strategy for the provision and protection of freshwater for all people. It also advocates that women, in their role as family managers, water-consumers and potential water-conservers, participate fully in relevant planning and decision- making.

Global Co-operation

Soroptimist International is committed to global co-operation, including in its objectives “international understanding and universal friendship”. It encourages clubs to establish “Friendship Links” with clubs in other countries, developing co-operation, through networking and participation in programmes that increase knowledge and understanding of different cultures, economic systems and life-styles. It also recognises the value of sharing projects and expertise with international organisations at local, national and international level.

Habitat

Soroptimist International believes that adequate safe shelter for all people, with 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 and that the provision of adequate housing should be made an international priority.

Recognising the acceleration of global urbanisation, it advocates that all development must be ecologically, socially and economically sustainable and that all those involved in planning and development should ensure that this is so. It urges the participation of women in the planning design and development.

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, which develop awareness and understanding of the basic sanctity of all human beings. It also recognises and respects the diversity of races, cultures and creeds and the need to raise awareness of human rights issues as set out in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

International Debt

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. It calls upon member nations to embark upon such a strategy with urgency, challenging governments to honour the commitments made at the World Summit for Children in 1990, the International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994 and the World Summit for Social Development 1995.

Soroptimist International further calls for the cancellation of all debt owed to donor countries by the most debt-distressed countries and a reduction in the debts owed to the World Bank and to the International Monetary Fund, in order to free up investment in basic social services. Its members will themselves work to alleviate poverty wherever possible and will continue to speak out against the misdirection of resources into military spending at the expense of basic social services.

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 throughout the world. It is particularly concerned for those elements of contemporary slavery which relate to the traffic in persons, sales of children child prostitution, prostitution and exploitative working systems and calls for concerted action at local, national and international levels to eliminate all forms of slavery from society.

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 its inherent dangers for the people of the world.

It 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, the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the Convention on Marine Pollution of 1972.

Soroptimist International will work with all appropriate organisations to monitor the actions of governments, to raise awareness of the inherent dangers of nuclear material and to acknowledge its peaceful use.

Oceans, Seas and Coastal Areas

Soroptimist International believes that 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.

For the protection of the total marine environment – the oceans, seas and coastal areas – it urges 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.

Ozone Layer Depletion

Soroptimist International is concerned about the depletion of the ozone layer by Chlorofluorocarbons (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.

It 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 honour their commitments.

Soroptimist International will work with all appropriate organisations to eliminate the use of products that destroy the ozone layer and increase ultra-violet radiation.

Parent Development Programmes

Recognising that profound disruptions have occurred in traditional family support systems, Soroptimist International supports the Platform for Action 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.

Many parents lack, or are unable to apply, the parenting skills that will provide an integrated childhood care system for their children. It therefore urges the provision of parent or legal guardian development programmes which should be multi-level, multi-agency effort and which should provide quality programmes adapted to the specific socio-cultural settings of the communities they serve.

Peace

Peace cannot be measured solely by the absence of conflict. It is inter-related with the just sharing of natural resources, social and economic development and the promotion of human rights. Soroptimist International therefore supports early education that promotes the concepts of justice, freedom, dignity and equality for all people, regardless of race, culture, creed or gender.

Through its involvement in world-wide international goodwill and understanding programmed, especially for young people, it seeks to implement in practical ways its commitment to the goals of peace, security and justice for all people. It advocates the inclusion of women in all negotiations relating 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. It urges the review of all educational materials and programmes to recognise and respect the diversity of races, cultures and creeds, to show that human rights are essential to the

promotion of peace and development and to reflect the concepts of justice, freedom, dignity and equality.

Preservation of Cultural, Historical and 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.

It therefore 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 which aims to preserve natural heritage.

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 accelerating 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.

It urges governments to ratify and implement all relevant existing international and regional treaties, conventions and protocols that protect mountains.

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. 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 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights in all legislation, in judicial systems and in employment, education and all social policies. It will work with all appropriate organisations to eliminate racism and racial discrimination.

Refugees

Soroptimist International accepts the 1951 United Nations Convention definition of a refugee but would advocate for formal refugee status for people displaced by natural disasters, famine, conflict, violations of human rights, for asylum seekers, stateless persons and women and girls who fear gender related persecution.

It urges governments, the United Nations and aid agencies to accept responsibility for the care and protection of such people. It further supports the concept of a properly funded, specially trained UN fast reaction unit to be deployed swiftly to areas threatened by internal conflict, to act as peacemakers, negotiating and diffusing such situations.

Recognising that this is an international problem, Soroptimist International is committed to finding a lasting solution to forced displacement and will co-operate with governments and civil society in identifying the causes of injustice, persecution and intolerance and promoting policies and practices which will eliminate them.

Rights of the Child

Soroptimist International 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. It 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.

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. It 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 discrimination against girls, including harmful attitudes and traditional practices, sexual exploitation and abuse which define her gender as second class within the family and society. It urges governments to fulfil their commitment to international conventions, treaties and agreements relating to the girl child, ensuring access to education and training and the realisation of her full potential.

Rights 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. It therefore urges Governments to make urgent plans and provision for the ageing population, including them in the development of policies, programmes and decisions, on all issues that will affect their lives.

Rights of the Single Parent Family

Soroptimist International has concerns for the parents (male or female) who are left without the support of partner or extended family. It is concerned about the discrimination they often encounter and the adverse effect this may have on the children. It advocates the recognition of the single parent family as a family unit with the right to receive the facilities and benefits enjoyed by the two parent family.

Safe Motherhood

Soroptimist International is aware that several million women die each year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth and that many more suffer permanent damage to their health. It supports the World Health Organisation's work to improve maternal health and make pregnancy safer. It advocates the inclusion of women, at all levels, in the policy making, programme formulation and implementation.

Soroptimist International urges governments to implement recommendations made in the Platform for Action adopted at Beijing in 1995, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo 1994 and the Millennium goal that aims to reduce maternal mortality by 75% by 2015. It will work with others to monitor the implementation of these commitments by governments and professional agencies.

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. It endorses the principle of sustainable development and 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.

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 to ensure the protection of the planet by sustainable development.

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. It urges governments to condemn as a common crime all forms of terrorism and to take immediate, effective measures to prevent and combat terrorist activities and to co-operate internationally for the speedy and final elimination of terrorism.

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. It recognises the urgency of finding a comprehensive solution to the problem and calls upon all member states to ratify the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and its related protocols, without reservations.

Upholding the fundamental human right to health, for all women and girls, Soroptimist International will join with the World Health Organisation and all other agencies in monitoring media promotion of tobacco, raising public awareness of the dangers of its usage, advocating greater tobacco control and initiating action – locally, nationally and internationally – 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.

It 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.

With the approval of the Soroptimists in these communities, Soroptimist International will work with all appropriate agencies to convince governments to forbid, by law, these harmful traditional practices.

Trafficking

Soroptimist International is gravely concerned about the devastating global increase in the trafficking of human beings, especially women and children and condemns this trans-national crime as a gross violation of human rights. Recognising that it has become too wide for single governments to fight, it urges total international co-operation in bringing perpetrators to justice. It calls for all governments to establish comprehensive policies that seek to eliminate the root causes of trafficking and to address the needs of victims.

Soroptimist International fully supports both the UN Convention against Trans-national Crime and its Protocol on Trafficking and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. It accepts the definition of trafficking as given in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children and will work with all appropriate agencies to eradicate the scourge of trafficking.

Transport by Sea of Potentially Hazardous Cargo

Soroptimist International is gravely concerned at 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. The subsequent economic and environmental cost is immeasurable and in many parts of the world this cost impacts especially on women.

Soroptimist International fully supports the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea brought into force in 1994 and recognises that when this law is followed correctly, the likelihood of an accident is rare. It therefore advocates that governments of all countries urgently implement this law. Soroptimist members will work with all agencies, locally, nationally and internationally to raise awareness of the dangers of transporting potentially hazardous cargo and to monitor each country's response to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Violence Against Women and Girls

Soroptimist International believes that violence of any kind is intolerable and in particular condemns the use and/or threat of all violence against women. Acts of violence endanger women physically, mentally, emotionally and economically, perpetuating and reinforcing unjustifiable inequalities in all aspects of women's lives. It supports the strategic objectives stated in the Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. It urges governments to secure the safety of girls and women from acts of violence, and to help them overcome the consequences when violence does occur.

Soroptimist International recognises education as the key to the prevention of violence. It urges the provision of appropriate programmes for victims and potential victims; of legal enforcement systems and the education of the media in order to address human rights protection, provision of resources and personal responsibility.

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 facilitate waste recycling and reuse, promote environmentally and hygienically sound waste disposal, provide incentives to reduce unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.

Women and Poverty

Soroptimist International recognises that the effects of poverty are most profoundly felt by women. The causes of poverty are complex and influenced by the national and international conditions of economics, war, trade, natural disasters, migration, health care and a multitude of social issues. The solutions are equally complex and all issues contributing to poverty must be addressed.

Soroptimist International urges governments to fulfil their commitment to the Millennium goals; to ensure a more equitable balance of financial and other resources, of access to education, training and employment opportunities; to include all women affected by poverty in the review and creation of anti-poverty policies and to encourage gender based research into the causes and solutions of poverty. It will work to end poverty and will co-operate with all appropriate organisations to monitor governments' implementation of programmes that target women and children.

Women as Business Owners

Soroptimist International endorses the right of women to become entrepreneurs, recognising that they are an essential production force in all economies. Women, many of whom are the sole earners within the family unit, must 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 enterprises run by women in rural and urban areas, to include them in planning and decision making and to improve their access to financial support, to education and training.

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. 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 is especially concerned about the situation of women, who represent nearly 50% of international migrants. It urges governments to implement policies of controlled migration, revise international migration legislation and regulations to protect women against exploitation and to include migrant women in consultation, decision making and in the development and implementation of programmes designed to benefit them, both in the workplace and in the community.

Women in Social and Economic Development

Soroptimist International fully supports the objectives of Article 55 of the Charter of the United Nations to promote higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development and endorses the principle of sustainable human development.

It emphasises that economic growth must benefit all people and therefore women and disadvantaged people need to be integrated into all phases of the process of development; development which aims at a balance between economic efficiency, social justice and a sustainable environment.

Youth

Soroptimist International believes that the imagination, ideals and energies of youth are vital for the continuing development of the societies in which they live and fully supports the objectives of the UN World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond. It urges governments to promote this with non-discriminatory programmes of education, health care, employment opportunities and cultural exchange. It further urges that they be protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation, allowed to participate in decision-making, and be taught to be tolerant, mutually respectful, and aware of the consequences of violence.

Soroptimist International will work with all appropriate agencies to foster international goodwill and understanding between young people and to raise their status in society.