

a global voice
for women

Soroptimist



International

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January 2012

MONTHLY FOCUS FILE:

SI AT THE UNITED NATIONS – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE!

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AWARENESS

What is the UN?

The United Nations is an international organisation founded in 1945 after the Second World War by 51 countries committed to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights. There are currently 192 Member States.

The UN is present all over the world, though it is primarily best known for peace-keeping and conflict resolution. The UN works on a wide variety of issues through various councils, agencies, technical support bodies, and committees – covering sustainable development, environment and refugees protection, disaster relief, disarmament and non-proliferation, promoting democracy, human rights, gender equality and the advancement of women, governance, economic and social development and international health, clearing landmines, expanding food production, and others. The UN is organised as follows:

The **General Assembly** is main body of the UN and contains representatives from each Member State. Decisions on questions of global importance are taken up by the General Assembly. Each Member State gets one vote. The GA has several subsidiary organs – Boards, Commissions, Committees, Councils and Panel, and Working Groups. The GA Secretariat is located in New York, USA.

The **Security Council** has the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. The SC also has several subsidiary bodies, including the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The SC is also empowered to investigate disputes or threats, recommend actions, and, in extreme cases, call for economic sanctions to stop aggression, or to call for military action. The SC has 5 permanent members (China, France, Russia, UK, and US) and ten non-permanent members.

The **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** is the principal UN organ to coordinate economic, social, and related work of the 14 UN specialised agencies, functional commissions and five regional commissions. ECOSOC serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues, and for formulating policy recommendations addressed to Member States and the United Nations system. There are 54 members of the Economic and Social Council. It is responsible for:

1. Promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress;
2. Identifying solutions to international economic, social and health problems;
3. Facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation; and
4. Encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Soroptimist International at the UN:

NGOs have been active in the United Nations since its founding. They interact with the UN Secretariat, programmes, funds and agencies and they consult with the Member States. NGO work related to the UN includes information dissemination, awareness raising, development education, policy advocacy, joint operational projects, and providing technical expertise and collaborating with UN agencies, programmes and funds. This work is undertaken in formal and informal ways at the national level and at the UN.

Soroptimist International is active at all the major UN centres around the world. We hold General Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council, (ECOSOC), official relations with several agencies and technical bodies, and a network of permanent SI representatives at all of the major UN centres.

SI works to ensure that the voices of women and girls around the world are included in international decision making and policy setting. Our experience with 'on the ground' projects all over the world drives our advocacy and lobbying efforts within the international community.

Our representatives also serve as a link to this international community and inform our members of emerging issues, trends, and best practices.

As a volunteer organisation, SI recruits Soroptimists who are able to give their time, energy and learning to monitor UN activities across the major UN Centres in New York, Geneva, Vienna, Paris, Rome and Nairobi.

SI's network of permanent representatives ensures that the priorities of SI are shared with decision makers and incorporated into debates, statements and policy wherever possible. They do this by following annual commissions, special sessions, seminars, NGO meetings and everything in between! Our Representatives are expert networkers, taking every opportunity to share the mission and vision of Soroptimist International!

"As often as I can, when invited to speak at a meeting I begin by saying: I am a UN Representative for Soroptimist International, a global organisation working for women and girls. I represent 90,000 voices and 180,000 feet!" - Lois Beilin, New York Representative

Click here to learn more about our fantastic UN Representatives:

<http://www.soroptimistinternational.org/si-at-the-un/learn-more-about-our-un-reps>

Join SI's Global Voice!

The best way to keep up to date with the latest SI at the UN news, as well as action ideas and resources for awareness raising, sign up to SI's monthly newsletter, Global Voice. [Click here](#) to get Global Voice direct to your inbox!

ADVOCACY

The Geneva Agencies

[The UN in Geneva](#)

Geneva is the home to many critical UN agencies including:

[The Human Rights Council](#)

[UN Refugee Agency](#)

[The World Health Organisation](#)

[UN AIDS](#)

[The International Labour Organisation](#)

[UNICEF](#)

In addition to attending the larger conferences held by these organisations, our representatives are also members of various NGO committees including human rights education, the working group on Gender Equality, Traditional Beliefs and Practices, and the NGO Group for the Status of Women.

To find out about why Geneva became a UN Centre in the first place, particularly as Switzerland did not become a member state until 2002, visit the SoroptiVoice blog to read our Geneva Representative's [January 2012 blog](#).

The New York Agencies:

New York is the headquarters for the UN. Major annual meetings include:

[The Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#),

[The Commission on Social Development](#)

[The Commission on Population and Development](#).

New York is also the HQ for

[UN Women](#)

[The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW)

[Department of Public Information](#), which is the information centre for NGOs.

The General Assembly begins its regular session in September. This is the main deliberative body of the UN. It is composed of representatives of member states, each having one vote. At the beginning

of each regular session, the GA holds a general debate expressing the views of the member states. Most of the questions are then referred to one of six committees:

1. Disarmament and International Security
2. Economic and Financial
3. Social, Humanitarian and Cultural
4. Special Political and Decolonisation
5. Administrative and Budgetary
6. Legal

Our SI Representatives follow the debate in the second and third committees.

Recent activity in New York:

[Reps Attend Rio+20 Intersessional Meeting](#)

[Adocacy Kit for CSW 56 Launched!](#)

[The Feminisation of Aging](#)

[International Water Forum at the UN](#)

The Paris agency:

[The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation](#)

UNESCO is headquartered in Paris. The Organisation also has more than 50 [field offices](#) around the world. UNESCO works to create the conditions for dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based upon respect for commonly shared values. It is through this dialogue that the world can achieve global visions of sustainable development encompassing observance of human rights, mutual respect and the alleviation of poverty, all of which are at the heart of UNESCO'S mission and activities.

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Our SI Representatives follow the debate in the second and third committees. Taking guidance from the Strategic Plan Programme Goals and Objectives, and the work Soroptimists do on the ground, representatives then decide what to concentrate their time and resources on.

Paris is a single agency centre, like Nairobi. This is a particularly important centre given SI's long term theme: Educate to Lead. Our UN Representatives in Paris represent SI on nine committees including the Education for All Monitoring Group, the Joint Programmatic Commission (JPC) on youth, the JPC on sustainable development and the JPC on a culture of peace.

Recent activity in Paris

[SI Reports from UNESCO Executive Board](#)

[SI Submission to UNESCO - International Migration](#)

[Young People's Forum Meet to Discuss Women, Africa and Human Development](#)

The Nairobi agency:

[The UN Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#)

Nairobi is the home to the UN Environment Programme. The UNEP is particularly concerned with climate change and environmental governance. Our Representatives have only been in post for 12 months but have attended several high level meetings, international consultations, taken part in workshops on farming practices and gender issues and joined the Global Major Groups Stakeholder Forum, doubling the number of women represented within this group. This agency is critical for the forthcoming Rio+20 Earth Summit and our Representatives have been playing an active role in the Women Major Stake Holder Group.

Recent activity in Nairobi:

[SI UNEP Representative Nominated for CSW Women of Distinction Award](#)

[SI Signs Rio+20 Women Major Stakeholder Group Statement](#)

[SI UNEP Representative Attends Consultation in Bonn](#)

[SI Representative Attends Gender, Disaster Risk Reduction and Youth Workshop](#)

[SI Releases World Environment Day Statement](#)

The Vienna agencies:

[The UN Industrial Development Organisation \(UNIDO\)](#)

UNIDO is the specialised agency of the United Nations that promotes industrial development for poverty reduction, inclusive globalization and environmental sustainability, working to improve living conditions for communities in need.

[The UN Office on Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\)](#)

UNODC is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime. Of note, UNODC is the only UN agency focussing on human trafficking and the implementation of the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols on trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling. UNODC also assists member states in improving criminal justice systems. This is an issue emerging as an area of particular concern for women. Check out the May 2011 Monthly Focus File on women and criminal justice (in the box to the right) to learn more.

Recent activity in Vienna:

[International Women's Day and Trafficking](#)

[54th Commission on Narcotic Drugs](#)

[Crime Commission 2011 - Women and Criminal Justice](#)

[SI Reps meet with the Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy](#)

The Rome Agencies:

[The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation](#)

[The World Food Programme](#)

Rome is the home to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Food Organisation. These agencies work closely to realise their shared vision of the world in which every man, woman and child has access at all times to the food needed for an active and healthy life. Read more about these agencies by [clicking here](#).

Recent activity in Rome:

[SI Hosts Side Event at the FAO Conference in Rome](#)

[FAO Conference: SI Past President speaks on microcredit](#)

[International Women's Day at the FAO](#)



[ACTION](#)

How can you support our UN Representatives?

Rome: 1 Billion Hungry Campaign

The World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation are the focus of the international 1 Billion Hungry campaign. 1 billion people live in chronic hunger. A hungry person is weak and tired, unable to concentrate, study or work. Hunger leads to illness. The body starts to feed on itself, eventually leading to starvation and death. There's a growing movement of people who want to bring this pressing issue to the attention of world leaders through the UN, forcing radical action.

Our UN Representative at the FAO in Rome has been following this campaign for over 2 years. She urges Soroptimists around the world to sign the below petition statement:

 **We who support this petition find it unacceptable that close to one billion people are chronically hungry. Through the United Nations, we call upon governments to make the elimination of hunger their top priority until that goal is reached.** 

[Click here](#) to visit the website and sign the petition statement. Over 3 million have signed so far, make sure your club does too!

New York and Nairobi: Rio+20 Advocacy Action

Last week, the zero draft document for [Rio+20](#) was released. This is the first version of the document which will be discussed and amended over the coming months, and after revision and addition, hopefully accepted by Member States attending the Rio+20 conference in Brazil, June 2012.

The document does not focus on legally binding agreements. Instead:

“We recognise that each country, respecting specific realities of economic, social and environmental development as well as particular conditions and priorities, will make the appropriate choices” (para 28).

Civil society (which includes you!) is urged to step forward and hold Government to account, leading by example. The document clearly states that “a fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision making” (para 17). We must be as invested in a sustainable future as our decision makers, and urge our Governments to make the “appropriate choices” to ensure Rio+20 is not another missed opportunity for global change.

Soroptimists, present in 124 countries/territories around the world, have the potential to influence over 60% of the UN member states attending Rio+20! We urge you to monitor the response of your Government to both this version of the draft document, and subsequent versions, as we move further down the road to Rio.

If you have any questions about Rio+20, or would like to discuss ideas for engaging your local and national decision makers, please contact hq@soroptimistinternational.org.

[LINKING TO EDUCATE TO LEAD](#)

Monthly Message from International Assistant Programme Director Anusha:

The month of February through early March 2012 is going to be extremely busy and meaningful for SI's work at the UN. The annual CSW meetings held at UN Headquarters in New York are scheduled from 27th February till 9th March. The theme for CSW 56 is “**empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges**”.

How can SI clubs take action in this area to enable progress in this area?

1. **Use** our postcard or letter template to **write** to your national government officials responsible for gender equality and women's issues. Visit www.soroptimistinternational.org to download and print the CSW56 Advocacy kit.

2. **Lobby** government officials, women's commissions, or other relevant targets in person to ensure that the voices of women and girls, as expressed in the Soroptimist International statement, are included in decision-making at this year's CSW. Make sure they have a copy of the SI statement!

3. **Educate** others about the issues raised in SI's statement and spread the word in your club and community. **Discuss** the issues with local community leaders to **enable** them to make the right decisions.

4. **Look out** for the outcomes of our CSW56 workshops on the SI website and [Global Voice](#) newsletter in March.

If you are interested to educate, empower and enable rural women and girls on their rights to have equitable access to seeds, fertiliser, water security and land tenure, then do identify a suitable project in a rural community where women farmers are in need. For example...

You can create awareness of educational opportunities and skills development for rural girls to help reduce their risk of being exposed to trafficking.

You can organise advocacy events to empower and educate women farmers on land ownership.

You can take action to enable and support women farmers to sell their produce for a fair price.

Check out all the links on SI website to discover the happenings at the various UN centres over the next month or two. You will be able to better educate, empower and enable women and girls when you are fully equipped with the supporting information from SI's work at the UN.

Anusha Santhirasthipam

International Assistant Programme Director