

# SI (Soroptimist International) Limited Company Report

2017



Editor:  
Company Secretary  
Deborah Thomas

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## About Soroptimist International

Soroptimists Educate, Empower and Enable women and girls to have an equal voice to achieve gender equality and strong, peaceful communities worldwide. Soroptimist International is committed to Human Rights for all, Global Peace and International Goodwill, advancing women's potential, integrity and democratic decision-making, volunteering, diversity and friendship.

The internationally agreed theme, until 2021 is 'Educate to Lead'.

Soroptimist International operates as a company limited by guarantee, SI (Soroptimist International) Limited; the company has four members:

The Federation of Soroptimist International of the Americas

The Federation of Soroptimist International of Europe

The Federation of Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland

The Federation of Soroptimist International of the South West Pacific

The company has twelve directors, three from each member federation, each director has one vote; voting in board meetings and by electronic ballot. Directors rotate according to the presidential term of their federation.

Four Authorised Representatives are appointed to participate in the annual general meetings and general meetings of the company; one representative from each member federation. The Authorised Representatives are usually confirmed annually to the Company Secretary.

The company has four officers who serve for a pre-determined biennium:

SI President

SI President Elect or SI Immediate Past President

SI Director of Advocacy

SI Treasurer

The SI President is also entitled to appoint consultants or special advisors. These may include a procedural consultant, special advisors to advocacy, communications and any special projects which the SI President may wish to review for the benefit of members.

The company has a Global Executive Director, who is also appointed as the Company's Secretary.

A team of 16 Soroptimists voluntarily serve as United Nations (UN) Representatives at 6 UN centres undertaking advocacy activity on behalf of the company.

This report covers the operating period January – December 2017.

## Foreword, by SI Immediate Past President, Yvonne Simpson and SI President 2017 – 2019, Mariet Verhoef Cohen

**Soroptimist International** celebrated the 2015 – 2017 biennium in July with significant success: Governance developments ensured SI was fit for purpose with new streamlined board and committee structures. SI Leadership Development ensured that directors were fully conversant with their responsibilities. Financial decisions were made that safeguarded and fostered SI's viability. The impact of SI's advocacy work was strengthened. The President's Appeal for the biennium, "Educate to Lead: Nepal", has exceeded goals and expectations. Steadfast progress has been made with the SI 2019 Kuala Lumpur Convention and SI Communications. The SI Board also agreed that the organisation would celebrate its centenary in 2021 with a Virtual Museum.

Succession planning was implemented which enabled a smooth transition to the new biennium and executive team. My grateful thanks to all Soroptimists who held international volunteer roles during the biennium and to all members globally, who have generously supported The President's Appeal. When passing on the baton, the 2015 – 2017 Board and I were confident that our organisation was ready to stride forward with our mission to transform the lives and status of all women and girls.

**Yvonne Simpson QSM, SI President 2015 – 2017**



In the second half of 2017 SI continued to focus on building the capacity of our five key areas of work: Advocacy, Communication, SI Convention, Strategic Leadership and the President's Appeal. SI's main objective Advocacy works across 6 UN Centres aligning its work to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals; the SDGs are a great opportunity to continue our fight for Human Rights and specifically for Women's Rights.



Communication features heavily in the SI goals. Clear and transparent communication is paramount, internally as well as externally, to demonstrate to the world that SI is the Global Voice for Women. Strong and fast-growing social media presence with professional marketing and promotional aids including: video presentations, webinars, blogs and the SI Global Voice newsletter. All valuable tools to continue to increase our presence in the international arena.

At the beginning of this biennium SI started to consider the future for the next 100 years with the implementation and realisation of the Soroptimist Lab, which will launch at the 2019 Kuala Lumpur, SI Convention. The Future African Federation is charting the way forward for a fifth federation, the Task Force and SI committee continue to develop their objectives and strategies to launch the new Federation during 2019. I am very pleased to confirm that Women, Water & Leadership, my President's Appeal 2017-2019 was launched in July with one project already implemented and two more planned for 2018. Willing to embrace the future, we are dedicated to our mission. Together with our wonderful global Soroptimist Network, we can, and will, achieve change for women and girls worldwide.

**Mariet Verhoef-Cohen Officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau', SI President, 2017-2019**

## **Restructure, by SI Chair of Restructuring Working Group, Carolyn Hudson**

During 2017 the SI Restructuring Working Group (RWG) continued to review the existing and future functions and governance structure of SI (Soroptimist International) Limited. During July 2017 board meeting held in Rotterdam, the RWG put forward a proposal which included size and composition of the SI Board and Officers; proposing to reduce in size whilst making a step change towards a skills-based board. The board agreed to the proposal and recognized that the decision strategically aimed to be cost effective while retaining significant involvement of its member Federations; all designed to align with the SI Board's 2016 - 2019 Strategic Plan approved in 2016. This restructuring was the result of two years of the concentrated efforts of a board-appointed Restructuring Working Group; Soroptimists were notified on 17 August 2017.

The new structure will ensure that Soroptimist International's governance model will involve its Directors with a focus on providing appropriate skills and will lead the Company to focus on its Mission in a more nimble and effective manner. The restructured SI Board comprises 11 voting directors, being the SI President, SI Treasurer, SI Director of Advocacy and two directors nominated by each Federation. It was recommended that the Federation nominated directors not be office holders of their Federation so that they can concentrate on SI. All SI committees, except Convention and President's Appeal, will henceforth be chaired by SI Directors, giving them a more direct involvement in the work of SI. The Governance and Constitution & Resolutions committees have been combined into one Governance committee and a new Communications committee has been formed. The new committee structure is better aligned with SI's key strategic priorities. The new model will be introduced on 01 January 2018.

The SI board has adopted a new operating year, in parallel with the financial year, of 1 January to 31 December. The President, Treasurer and Advocacy Director and most other position holders will change position on 1 January. Future SI Bienniums will commence on 1 January of even numbered years, e.g. 2018, 2020, 2022, etc. The two Directors from each Federation will serve overlapping two-year terms each, one changing on 1 January each year: their terms of office are no longer linked to any Federation cycles, giving more continuity to SI.

## **Governance, by SI Chair of Governance, RoseMary Reid**

In 2017, the purpose of the Governance Committee was to assist the Board in meeting its responsibilities for the integrity of the financial reporting, the effectiveness of the internal control and risk management systems and for monitoring the effectiveness and objectivity of the external auditors.

The Governance Committee's responsibility was to ensure delivery of the Board's Governance Policy as agreed in August 2012 namely that: "The Board establishes the guiding principles and policies for the Organisation, delegates responsibility and authority to those responsible for enacting them, and monitors compliance to ensure staff and board alike are held accountable for their performance".

The Constitution and Resolutions Committee was responsible for the interpretation of SI governance documents and make suggestions regarding alterations to the Articles, the Bye-laws,

and all other governing documents. Under the new SI structure approved in July 2017, these two committees were merged into one committee and now operates as the Governance Committee.

Upon the approval of the new SI structure, the Constitutions and Resolutions Committee undertook an extensive review of the Articles and Byelaws and prepared amendments to these governing documents to reflect the new structure. The Articles of Association were amended and approved by the Authorised Representatives via Mail Ballot AR01 October 26, 2017. The Byelaws were then amended to reflect the new structure and in accordance with the amended Articles of Association. The amended Byelaws were approved by the SI Board of Directors, Resolution 2017/26, at the November 2017 Board Meeting. The approved Articles and Byelaws prepared the organization for the commencement of the new structure effective January 1, 2018.

At the December 2017 Board Meeting, the new structured Governance Committee was directed by the Board to review all governing documents and update, as required, to ensure the documents reflected the new structure.

### [\*\*Leadership Development, by SI Immediate Past President, Yvonne Simpson\*\*](#)

Soroptimist International Strategic Leadership is one of five SI key priority areas with the goal that SI leadership employs best governance practices and that the SI Board of Directors will have the knowledge and expertise to meet their responsibilities. The Objective is to Increase the preparedness of current and future board members in respect of their responsibilities and duties as directors of SI.

During 2017 the Leadership Development Committee (LDC) supported SI Advocacy, the SI President's Appeal and directors by developing webinars for Soroptimists from all four federations, these included:

- Soroptimists attending or interested in CSW. A representative from our partner Women for Women Partnerships joined us.
- How SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 6 (Water) goals set by the UN to be achieved by 2030, relate to the SI Mission to transform the lives and status of women and girls.
- The 2017 – 2019 President's Appeal: Women, Water and Leadership: Access to water determines the way in which individuals and communities plan, envisage and shape their future, and women's contributions and leadership is increasingly accepted as key in this process. Currently the workforce of the water sector worldwide comprises only 17% women. Their expertise, if harnessed through education and empowerment, can position women as effective leaders, and increase this percentage substantially.

The LDC also facilitated production of video clips featuring SI UN Representatives, Directors and Executive Team members, these were made available to all Soroptimists via the SI website. A very informative training session on UN Centres of Geneva and Rome was held for Directors and Silent Observers at the annual general meeting in Rotterdam in July (2017). A recorded session on UN and SI work in Geneva was and uploaded to the SI website for members to access.

## Global Advocacy

Soroptimist International advocates for human rights and gender equality through education and empowerment in six United Nations Centres: Geneva, New York, Vienna, Paris (UNESCO), Rome-World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Nairobi.

The SI UN representatives are our voice in the United Nations. They work together with other NGOs, meet with UN personnel and country missions to advance the Soroptimist International position. They are critical to helping achieve our advocacy goals by serving on committees, arranging side events, forwarding our statements and attending UN events. They raise our profile by sharing the best practices obtained from grassroots club projects. They also, keep us informed and current on important issues that affect women and girls and of the role of Civil Society in the UN.

During 2017 there were 17 United Nations representatives working on issues that affect women and girls. Our work focuses on Sustainable Development Goals 4 Education, 5 Gender Equality and Goal 6 Water, for the Soroptimist International President's Appeal; though our work often intersects with all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In New York work focuses on gender equality, sustainable development, financing for development, trafficking, migration, education, ageing, and peace and security. The Soroptimist UN Representatives in New York are Bette Levy, Marie D'Amato-Rizzi, Barbara Rochman, Frances Zainoeddin, Sandy Hecker and Vanesa Treers.

Geneva's focus is human rights including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and the United Nations Refugee Agency. Our UN representatives in Geneva in 2017 were Wilfreda Hendricks, Teviana Kamai and Kristín Reynisdóttir and Angela Savauge who was appointed UN representative designate in October of 2017.

SI UN representatives in Vienna focus on issues relating to eliminating violence against women and girls, including human trafficking, elder abuse, and harmful traditional practices. Dr. Martina Gredler, and Dora Vrdlovec served as UN representatives. Christine Peer was appointed in July 2017 to assist the team.

Dr. Liliana Mosca is the SI UN representative in Rome where SI's work focuses on women's role in food production and distribution. The work in Paris focuses on Literacy and SI UN representatives help to organize an event for International Literacy Day. Representatives Rina Dupriet and Marie Christine Gries work on other issues relating to women and girls as they arise and bring many opportunities to SI.

In Nairobi the focus is environmental issues as they relate to women and girls. During 2017 the UN team in Nairobi was active in planning for the UN Environment Assembly that took place in December 2017. Our UN representatives Alice Odingo and Rose Mwangi were joined by three new UN representative designates, Mary Muia, Betty Oluoch and Sophie Koech in December 2017.

It was a busy year for Soroptimist International with attendance at meetings and high-level events at the UN, including the Commission on Social Development, Commission on the Status of Women 61, and High Level Political Forum in New York; the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Vienna; UNEP and UNEA 3 in Nairobi.

SI had the unique opportunity to send three young Soroptimist representatives: Lee Ann Cochran, Amrita Gautam and Victoria Prichert to the 7th International UNESCO NGO Forum, *Youth and Their Social Impact* held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in May 2017. Attending this conference offered a rare opportunity for Soroptimists from different parts of the world to come together with one united voice and to share the voice of Soroptimist today and in the future.

The strategic plan for SI Advocacy was approved in November of 2017. The plan focuses on four areas: CSW coordination, increasing our capacity at the UN, strategic planning for our advocacy and advancing human rights and equality of women and girls through Empowerment and Education.

The Director of Advocacy was Pat Black (SIGBI) from January-July 2017 and Beverly Bucur (SIA) August to present. The members of the Advocacy Committee during 2017 were: Cheri Fleming (SIA), Sigrid Ag (SIE), Barbara Dixon (SIGBI), Diane Lockwood (SISWP), Linda Witong Abraham, and the United Nations Representatives.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



*"Soroptimist International supports the Sustainable Development Goals"*

## Soroptimist International President Appeals



a global voice  
for women

Women, Water & Leadership  
SI President's Appeal 2017-2019

Soroptimists Educate, Empower and Enable through Water

### SI President Appeal: Women, Water and Leadership by SI Assistant Director of Advocacy 2017 -2019, Hafdis Karlsdottir

The scarcity of water and sanitation has an immense impact on the lives of women and girls. Instead of earning an income or being able to go to school, women and girls are forced to be the primary water carriers for their families. Globally, women constitute 40 percent of the world's farmers and are often responsible for collecting water for food production. It is therefore mostly women who are impacted when water is scarce. Women can play an important role in addressing this situation, their unique expertise and knowledge being vital to mitigate water scarcity.

Conditions need to be created to facilitate women and girls to play their role as leaders to achieve equal access to water for all uses e.g. by providing vocational training at different levels and making sure budget is available for women to be empowered. This is the focus of Women, Water & Leadership (WWL) which simultaneously works toward three of the Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 4 (Education) and SDG 6 (Water).



WWL is promoting the inclusion of women in water resource governance as experts and leaders, during all phases of the projects, through education and capacity building - from design through to implementation and monitoring. The appeal aims to raise a minimum of £350,000 over the two years and support at least five projects on five continents. The projects will empower at least 500 women to be self-supporting through implementing water projects and 100 women will be enabled and educated to take leadership.

The first project supported by WWL is “Improving access to agricultural information, clean energy and water to achieve better food security for 500 women farmers in Kenya, Africa” where the SI Union of Kenya is working with the Mwihoko Women’s Group. The women farmers are receiving vocational training and capacity building to manage their farms effectively and to ensure food security, especially since the water supply in their areas is scarce. They are instructed on enterprise value chains, including more productive animal husbandry and crops; fertilizers, finances, value addition and marketing. In 2018 WWL plans to expand its work implementing projects in Bulgaria, Malaysia and Brazil.

**SI President Appeal: Educate To Lead: Nepal**  
**by SI Assistant Director of Advocacy 2015 – 2017, Sharon Fisher**



Thanks to Soroptimist clubs and members from around the world Educate to Lead: Nepal has exceeded the goals. Our choice from the beginning was to focus on rural Nepal and the implementation of our projects addressed SDG 4 – Quality Education, SDG 5 – Gender Equality and SDG 6 – Clean water and sanitation. We have about 20 projects at varying stages of completion, being supported by the financial generosity of Soroptimist members from all Federations in the amount of £401,858.71. We expect to directly impact the lives of at least 7,000 women and girls and many, many more indirectly. Best practices indicated where we could best impact the women and girls in post-earthquake Nepal, these included:

- Scholarships for girls to include books, fees, and uniforms and in many cases room & board due to the distance they need to walk to come to school.
- Skills training to provide economic opportunities.

- Women's groups and Women's conferences as a mechanism to teach and provide support including human rights and gender equality. In many of these rural areas, women do not even know sending their daughter to school is an option thus these young girls are subjected to a life of hard work, early marriage or trafficking.
- Feminine Hygiene – Sending girls to a hut during their period due to the belief they were cursed or unclean partially due to the lack of feminine hygiene products is a significant issue. Chaupadi although banned several years ago is still widely practiced with the penalty (if applied) being only a few dollars.
- Overcoming emotional trauma from violence after being rescued from trafficking to prepare to receive further education. The incidence of trafficking in Nepal to the brothels of India and beyond is a pandemic due to poverty and lack of understanding when women and girls are lured by the prospects of work in the city.
- Computer Literacy and English Literacy
- Improving the quality of teacher training in rural areas.
- Ensuring ongoing commitment to projects. Being accepted in rural villages is not just showing up once but returning again and again and being accepted into the community.

We are already hearing success stories from these projects and the final report is expected to be completed for presentation at our 2019 Soroptimist International Convention.

Strengthening the mothers has a big impact: not only does the financial situation of the whole family improve; women also have a higher position in the patriarchal structure. The education of girls is not considered very important in Nepalese society. Many only go to school rarely or are forbidden to do so. However, if the mothers continue to educate themselves and thereby improve the living conditions of the family, the education of the daughters is also valued more highly. Thank you again for supporting and standing beside these courageous women and girls who are hoping to have an equal voice in their community and beyond.



## 2019 International Convention

During 2017 preparations for the Soroptimist International 2019 Convention continued; the Convention will be held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, Malaysia from 18 to 21 July 2019. Convention Chair Puan Sri Siew Yong Gnanalingam, Co-Chairs Dato Anusha Santhirasthipam and Joanne Yeoh and the Convention Committee worked closely with SI President Mariet Verhoef Cohen and SI Global Executive Director Deborah Thomas to undertake early day preparations. Siew Yong and Anusha worked tirelessly to secure sponsors and to develop the programme with global key note speakers and to promote the convention at SIGBI and SIE Federation conferences.

This quadrennial convention will celebrate the quadrennium 2015 – 2019, attracting Soroptimists from all around the globe. Further information regarding the convention, including programme and delegate registration can be found here: <https://siconventionkl2019.org/>. SI President Mariet, SI Immediate Past President Yvonne, the Board of Soroptimist International, 2019 Convention Chair Siew Yong and SI Global Executive Director Deborah look forward to welcoming you to Kuala Lumpur.



## Closing Remarks, Global Executive Director, Deborah Thomas

2017 has been a transformative year for Soroptimist International. 2017 marked the last time when SI would end a biennium midway through the calendar year, holding very productive board meetings and an annual general meeting in Rotterdam; these were followed by a wonderful celebration of the biennium for SI Immediate Past President Yvonne Simpson (Soroptimist International of the South West Pacific) and the start of the new biennium for SI President Mariet Verhoef Cohen (Soroptimist International of Europe).

With the recommendations of the SI Restructuring Working Group agreed by the SI Board, fiscal matters were aligned to ensure the company is fit for purpose as the organisation moves forward and approaches its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Leadership Development team have supported this transition using 21<sup>st</sup> century technology to deliver strategic leadership training webinars to our globally dispersed team, to assist them prepare as they take up their SI roles.

SI Advocacy work continues to lobby and advocate for gender equality and the human rights of women and girls, through our permanent representatives at six UN Centres and through our powerful President Appeals. Our collective teams of Soroptimist Volunteers from around the globe, supported by staff at SIHQ in Cambridge, together show endless dedication to our work and mission. With more members than ever signing up to our SI e-newsletter, Global Voice, support from Soroptimists worldwide for our SI President Appeals, and the joined hands of the team organising the 2019 International Convention, Soroptimist International is striding forward as a powerful, global agent of change for women and girls everywhere.

## **Our Vision**

“Women and girls will achieve their individual and collective potential realise aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide”

## **Our Mission**

“Soroptimists transform the lives and status of women and girls through education, empowerment and enabling opportunities”

## **Our Principles**

- The advancement of the status of women
- High ethical standards
- Human rights for all
- Equality, development and peace; and
- The advancement of international understanding, goodwill and peace



**SI President Appeal, Women Water and Leadership, Project One: Mwihoko Women Farmers, Kenya**

## Useful Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>United Nations (UN) Related:</b>	
ECOSOC	(United Nations) Economic and Social Council
CSocD	(United Nations) Commission for Social Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and cultural Organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
UN DPI	United Nations Department of Public Information
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation (Rome and Nairobi)
WFP	World Food Programme (Rome and Nairobi)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
<b>Other Organisations:</b>	
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ACE and FM	Action On Child, Early and Forced Marriage
WfWP	Women for Water Partnership
	(,), (,),
<b>Soroptimist International (SI):</b>	
SIHQ	Soroptimist International Headquarters
SI P	Soroptimist International President
SI PE	Soroptimist International President Elect
SI DA	Soroptimist International Director of Advocacy
SI ADA	Soroptimist International Assistant Director of Advocacy
SI GED	Soroptimist International Global Executive Director
LDC	Leadership Development Committee
WWL	Women Water and Leadership (2017-19 SI President Appeal)



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