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Bonn, 9th Dec. 2011

Dear Union and Single Club Presidents, Dear Governors,

Tomorrow is our **Soroptimist Day**. This day has been specially linked to Human Rights Day, commemorating the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948**. Many of us can look upon the Human Rights' situation in the world from a sheltered position, others in our Federation are in the midst of struggles to obtain even the most basic rights. They have the difficult part and we must not forget them. All of us should speak out when we are witness of Human Rights violations.

2011 has been a decisive year regarding the struggle for Human Rights. Things have happened in Northern Africa which nobody had thought would be possible. Once again women were among the demonstrators for basic rights, but when it comes to concrete positions of power, men take over again in the majority.

But there have been real highlights in this month of December once more, with a substantial **international recognition for women**: three of them have won **the Right Livelihood Award** which is also called **the Alternative Nobel Prize!** The women winners are: **American midwife Ina May Gaskin** who teaches and promotes childbirth methods that best serve the mental and physical health of mother and child; **Jacqueline Moudeina, a lawyer from Chad**, who defends the rights of victims of dictatorship, especially women and child soldiers; and **Renée Vellvé**, representing the Barcelona-based non-profit organization **GRAIN** - short for Genetic Resources Action International. The group defends the **rights of small scale farmers** and local communities mainly in Africa, Asia and Latin America, amid pressures from big corporations and countries that are buying up farmland (known as **land-grabbing**). Here again our SI/E-theme **Water and Food** proves to be running throughout the current situation: "We will not solve the global food crisis until people stop trying to replace small-



scale farming systems with large-scale corporate-controlled industrial approaches. **We need a food system that feeds people, not markets.**”

During this last month of November I have been promoting projects with Water and Food, comma and especially **school gardens**. Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the St. Petersburg club in the company of more than 100 guests, I met three Soroptimists from the Ukrainian **club of Kiev** who are planning to set up a school garden as their long term project. They have been supporting a children’s home of kids with visual handicaps for years. They want to plant special herbs and strong-scented plants. In St. Petersburg I also met **Karin Standler** (standler@chello.at) from Vienna, a **landscape architect** who is a **specialist in school gardens**, and who immediately came up with some good ideas for the Kiev sisters and offered concrete help.

Three new clubs were chartered in this month: the **clubs of Mosbach** (Germany), **Við Húnaflóa** (Iceland) and **Maseno** (Kenya). Congratulations to all of the new members and good luck for your club life!

In my last letter I had to inform you of the resignation of Jenifer Beles, who has left our Headquarters to start a new job to further her career. This time I can tell you that we are glad to have a new Executive Director, **Anne Simon**, who worked with Pricewaterhouse Coopers for some 20 years in various positions in Geneva, London, New York, and most recently in Dubai where she launched and led the Middle East Strategy and Survey Unit. Her focus was **Women's Empowerment and Leadership in the Arab World**. She summarised the challenges faced by Arab women striving to reach leadership positions in the publication, “The Arab Women Leadership Outlook”. Anne Simon is pleased to join “a reputable organisation” that serves “the noble cause” of improving the lives of women and girls. Anne Simon lives with her family just outside Geneva. She has French-Swiss dual nationality and speaks fluent English. Anne Simon will begin work in January 2012. The SI/E Board and the staff at headquarters are certain that Anne Simon will be an excellent asset to our common commitment. All of us wish Anne Simon the very best for her start in our organisation.

At this point I would like to say a big **“Thank you”** to all who have supported me during these first months of my biennium, in particular **our staff in Geneva** who have proved themselves to be excellent collaborators and showed great solidarity for our common cause to be a **global voice for women**.

I wish all of us **great success** in all our endeavours and I am sending you **happy seasonal greetings**.

