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A MESSAGE FROM YOUR BRAND NEW ADVOCACY TEAM!

Dear members of Soroptimist International of Europe,
Welcome to the first edition of the quarterly Advocacy Newsletter!

It is with great excitement that the new Advocacy Team greets all our Soroptimist friends in every Club and Union across the European Federation! As you know, the activities devoted to accomplishing the primary goal of our organisation – *improving the lives and status of women and girls* – were originally simply covered by 'Programme' but was recently divided into 'Programme' and 'Advocacy'. This change was made in order to strengthen the voice of the 35,000 members of Soroptimist International of Europe at the local, national, and international levels. It seeks to give more weight to the capacity of Soroptimists to be active agents of change when it comes to discriminatory laws or traditional mindsets that intentionally or inadvertently hold women and girls back in society.

The SIE Advocacy Team brings together five representatives to European institutions, a Vice-President for Advocacy, the President-Elect, as well as SIE Headquarters staff. Since this is the first issue of the Advocacy Newsletter, we would like to take a few minutes of your time to talk about what advocacy is, where Soroptimist International of Europe has official accreditation to advocate for particular issues, and what you, as members of Soroptimist Clubs and of Unions, can do to act as advocates for women's and children's issues within your community and beyond.

Elena Savu, *Vice President for Advocacy*

Maria-Elisabetta de Franciscis, *President Elect & Head of Programme & Advocacy*

In Case You're Wondering...

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is "any action that speaks in favour of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others". *

Advocacy can entail many different types of activities: awareness raising, community mobilisation around a particular cause, educating law makers on aspects of a certain issue, producing informational resources and running educational campaigns through the Internet and other media, in public lectures, panels, seminars...

Advocacy can take many shapes and forms but, at the end of the day, it aims to influence or change public policy and shape policies, laws, standards, and mindsets.

Soroptimists, as a tight network of 35,000 professional women in positions of influence in their communities across Europe and Africa are uniquely well placed to be effective advocates for women's and children's issues around the world!

WHAT DOES THE SIE ADVOCACY TEAM DO?

The mission of the Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) Advocacy Team is to act in a professional, informed, and dedicated way to raise awareness about women's and children's issues and to make Soroptimists an active part of policy debates relevant to women and children at the local, national, and international levels.

Advocacy is our primary tool to ensure that women have their voices heard, at all levels, on issues that are important to them: education, empowerment, the elimination of violence against women, health, environmental sustainability...

In doing so, the Advocacy Team will ensure public visibility for the excellent work done by our members so that Soroptimists can act as role models for others looking for ways to get involved in the betterment of the lives of women and children. In this sense, our work complements the work of the Programme Team, and together, we are committed to further develop SIE's role as **A Global Voice for Women.**

*Alliance for Justice. *What is Advocacy? Definitions and Examples.*
http://www.mffh.org/mm/files/AFJ_what-is-advocacy.pdf



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WHERE ARE WE OFFICIALLY ACCREDITED?

At the European level, Soroptimist International of Europe holds official accreditation at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and the Council of Europe. It is also active at the Commission for the Status of Women and the European Women's Lobby.

UNITED NATIONS ECOSOC

ECOSOC is one of the principal bodies of the United Nations. It is responsible for a number of UN agencies including the ILO, UNESCO, FAO, WHO, UNICEF and UNDP, as well as functional and regional commissions, the most important of which for SIE include:

- The Commission for the Status of Women (CSW)
- The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)
- The Commission on Population and Development (CPD)
- The Commission on Social Development (CSocD)
- The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
- The Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

ECOSOC, which holds its sessions in Geneva and New York, has 54 member countries at any point in time, elected by the United Nations General Assembly for a three year term. Of the 54 member states, 14 are always African, 6 East European and 13 West European.

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.



Less than 150 privileged NGOs, among them Soroptimist International of Europe, hold general

consultative status to the Council, allowing them to engage in the work of the UN by making statements, participating in panels, meetings and round tables, in other words, by engaging in advocacy!

See: <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/>

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The **Council of Europe** (CoE), based in Strasbourg and entirely separate from the European Union, is an international organisation dedicated to the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy across its 47 member states.

The CoE issues standards, charters and conventions that are binding between the member states but do not constitute laws as such. These regulations cover issues on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Thus, common values and practices are developed throughout Europe on topics like gender equality, education policy, internet governance, and many more.

In the domain of human rights, the Council of Europe issued the *European Convention on Human*



Rights whose implementation in all 47 states is monitored through the European Court of Human Rights, also a CoE body. Other important human rights conventions of particular relevance to Soroptimists include the *Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (also known as the *Istanbul Convention*) as well as the *Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*, and the *Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*.

Civil society is included into the development of conventions thanks to the 400 International NGOs which have participatory status. Soroptimist International of Europe is a proud holder of such participatory status.

See: <http://hub.coe.int/> or contact SIE representatives Françoise Ferey (francoise.ferey@free.fr) and Bettina Hahne (bettina.hahne@fastmail.fm)



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EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY

The **European Women's Lobby (EWL)** is a European NGO and the largest umbrella organisation for women's associations in the EU. Representing the interests of about 2,500 women's organisations from the 28 member states of the EU, three EU candidate states, and women's associations in Europe, the EWL works to "achieve equality between women and men, to promote women's rights in all spheres of public and private life, to work towards economic and social justice for all women in their diversity, and to eliminate all forms of male violence against women." Its Secretariat General is located in Brussels.



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

A team of expert researchers make up the Observatory on Violence against Women at the EWL. Their latest report, *The 2013 EWL Barometer on Rape*, is a chilling account of the incidence of rape in European countries. Like Soroptimist International of Europe, EWL also holds ECOSOC and CoE accreditation and as such acts as a watchdog of European legislation in respect of women's issues. With more than 20 years' experience of lobbying and advocacy work at the European level, the EWL is a fantastic example for Soroptimists of how to promote women's issues through targeted advocacy work.

See: www.womenlobby.org or contact SIE representative
Renate Smith-Kubat (renate.smith@telenet.be)

OSCE

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is the world's largest security-oriented intergovernmental organisation made up of 57 member states across Europe, Asia and North America.

Its mandate covers many different areas including politico-military issues, economic and environmental issues and, most importantly for Soroptimists, human issues.



Indeed, OSCE's oldest institution is the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) based in Warsaw. Amongst other things, ODIHR deals with human trafficking, violence against women, and gender equality. The commitments made by OSCE member states aim to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to promote the principles of democracy by building, strengthening and protecting democratic institutions, and promoting tolerance throughout the OSCE region.

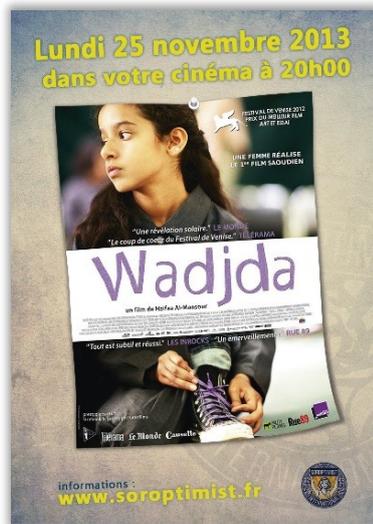
See: <http://www.osce.org/> or contact SIE representatives Vera Gregor (vgregor@gmx.net) and Irena Coufalova (coufal.z@bhnet.cz)

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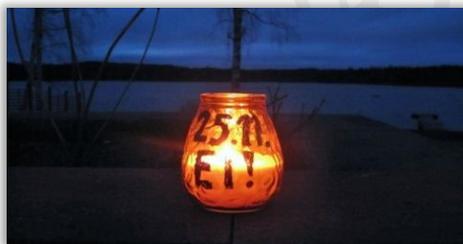
35,000 SOROPTIMISTS ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS!

Violence against women

On 25 November 2013, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, **Soroptimists in France** organised a country-wide project to raise awareness about violence against women. The project involved the screening of the movie *Wadjda* in 80 cities in France. *Wadjda* is the first feature film produced by a woman in Saudi Arabia, Haifa El Mansour. It is a film about intergenerational solidarity, about women's aspirations, about their ability to find the unexpected resources to fight for themselves and for others. All profits from the screenings will be donated to local associations combatting violence against women.



On the same day, **Finnish Soroptimists** organised an awareness-raising campaign for the elimination of violence against women. They lit orange candle lanterns with the date "25.11." and the word "No!" written on them and left them in visible, public places. Finnish Soroptimists joined Soroptimists around the world in saying NO! to violence against women and girls.



Girls' education

Soroptimists in Mumias, Kenya, in collaboration with **Soroptimists from Denmark** implemented a project called *Keep our girls in school*. The project involved an awareness-raising campaign for girls. Soroptimists distributed sanitary towels to the girls to reduce their school absenteeism especially during their monthly periods and talked to them about school attendance.



Women's leadership

Norwegian Soroptimists organised a project to raise the number of female leaders in both politics and business in the Norwegian region of Lister. The project sought to inspire women to take on leading positions at work or in politics. Soroptimists organised an open event where they invited the administrative leader of their county to talk about her experience as a pioneer in several positions that were traditionally filled by men.

Child marriage

Soroptimists in Uludağ in Turkey arranged a talk to prevent child marriages at a girls' vocational high school. People with different areas of expertise – a doctor, a lawyer, a psychologist and educators – all spoke to the girls about the consequences of child marriage, including the risk of violence involved.

Children's rights

Austrian Soroptimists successfully campaigned for the enforcement of a national law for the protection of children's rights in the context of domestic violence.



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ADVOCACY NEWS
SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF EUROPE

SAYING IT OUR WAY

Soroptimists are gaining a stronger voice in the international arena! Since the beginning of President Ulla’s 2013-2015 Biennium, Soroptimist International of Europe has delivered three statements on women’s and children’s issues. We plan to continue this new trend in order to make Soroptimism a real force for the promotion of women’s issues and children’s rights at the international level. Please stay tuned for further statements and make sure to post them on your website and diffuse them widely !

EUROPEAN ANTI-TRAFFICKING DAY, 18 OCT 2013

Soroptimist International of Europe, on behalf of its 35,000 members, issued a statement supporting the call launched by the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE for a concerted global response to fight the transnational scourge of trafficking in persons.

Calling for the need to “move from a national security model to a human rights-based approach” in order to better protect, assist, provide remedies for, and re-integrate victims, the statement asks for greater cooperation between “origin, transit, and destination countries, but also with regional and international mechanisms, as well as private stakeholders such as multi-national corporations and civil society organisations”.

Soroptimists, as active members of civil society, continue to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of human trafficking as well as on the education of women and girls in at risk groups within source countries. To read SIE’s full statement, please click [here](#). The joint UN/CoE/OSCE statement can be found [here](#).

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 18 Oct 2013. *Victims of trafficking: “Human beings with human rights that must be protected”* European Anti-Trafficking Day. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13869&LangID=E>

ADVOCATE! Is your country a country of origin, transit or destination for victims of trafficking? Raise awareness of this complex and difficult issue in your country and beyond!

WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE, NOV 2013

Within the framework of the Warsaw Climate Change Conference (11-22 Nov 2013), a declaration advocating the unbreakable link between climate change and human rights issued by the Council of Europe’s Conference of INGOs was adopted by the CoE’s Standing Committee. The Declaration, which kind be found [here](#) (or in [French](#)), calls for urgent action on behalf of governments and civil society alike towards combatting climate change and “officially recognising the right to a healthy environment as a fundamental human right.” As a member of the CoE’s Conference of INGOs, Soroptimist International of Europe issued a further statement in support of this initiative. You can read it [here](#).



UN Framework Convention for Climate Change. 5 Nov 2013. *Convention on Climate Change – Climate Change and Human Rights*. <http://unfccc-councilofeurope-ingos.weebly.com/>

ADVOCATE! Climate change is everyone’s problem – call on your government to act now!

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, 25 NOV 2013

On the occasion of November 25th, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against



Women, Soroptimist International of Europe issued a statement reiterating the firm

commitment of its 35,000 professional women members in 58 countries across Europe and Africa to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. With prevalence rates of violence against women averaging 24% in Europe – and reaching 70% in some countries in the world – Soroptimists continue to advocate for and work on achieving a world *safe from fear, safe from violence* for all women and girls around the world. To read the full statement, please click [here](#).

ADVOCATE! Contribute to your country’s policy debate on eliminating VAW – call for the institution of relevant laws and, equally



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CAUSES WORTH FIGHTING FOR!

THE RATIFICATION OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

Has your country signed?

The *Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, also known as the [Istanbul Convention](#) has since its issuing in May 2011 been signed by 32 states but ratified by only 8 of those: Albania, Austria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Serbia and Turkey. The governments of these 8 countries have therefore committed themselves to integrating the stipulations of the Istanbul Convention into their national laws, to being bound by the Istanbul Convention, and to implementing a set of measures in terms of prevention, protection, and prosecution. But! According to Article 75, the Convention will only come into force once 10 signatory countries (8 of which must be members of the Council of Europe) have ratified it. Soroptimists therefore call for the urgent ratification in the remaining 24 signatory countries! For a full list of countries, please see [link](#).

ADVOCATE! Lobby for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in your country!

ENDING PROSTITUTION

Equality Now, an organisation that advocates for the human rights of women and girls around the world and specifically seeks legal and systemic change to address violence and discrimination against women and girls, has launched a campaign calling on the United Nations to “listen to survivors and to clarify its position regarding pimping, brothel-keeping and buying sex.” Representing a coalition of nearly 100 organisations, many of which are survivor-led, Equality Now launched the petition in response to the publication of two UN reports, *HIV and the Law: Risks, Rights and Health* (2012) and *Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific* (2012), which argue for the decriminalisation of all aspects of the commercial sex industry and therefore contradict the *UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* as well as findings that such decriminalisa-

tion does not protect victims. For more information, please go [here](#).

Equality Now. 20 Sep 2013. *United Nations: Listen to survivors – don't jeopardize efforts to prevent sex trafficking.*

http://www.equalitynow.org/take_action/sex_trafficking_action511

ADVOCATE! Sign Equality Now's petition [here](#) and advocate for the “Swedish model” in your country too!

THE SITUATION IN SYRIA & ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN

On November 25, 2013, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls, a Round Table was organised at the European Parliament in Brussels. Laila Alodaat, a Syrian human rights lawyer, described the current situation in her country: “*There are only few documented crimes against Syrian women, as there is nobody to do it. Women are extremely vulnerable as they cannot defend themselves, contrary to the fighters who can protect each other. [...] Already before the conflict there was always great disrespect for women. [...] They won't complain, such is life. [...] In order to help the women, the war must end. Then laws are needed. And lots of humanitarian aid and training is necessary in the camps. Women need to be empowered so that they are not considered objects any more. They must learn that it isn't normal and acceptable that they are mistreated. Many women don't even know that they have rights*”.

For further information about the appalling current events in Syria and the deplorable human rights situation there, we encourage you to watch this BBC Panorama documentary about two courageous British female doctors volunteering in Syrian hospitals and refugee camps and witnessing the suffering of the civilian population in Syria: [link to documentary](#).

CALL! The SIE Board is launching a call to help: Soroptimist International of Turkey will support Syrian refugees in camps. All donations will be used to purchase blankets, heaters, staple foods, and other essentials for women and children in refugee camps. For more information, please click [here](#). Please donate generously.



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ADVOCATE! *Call on international institutions to protect Syrian women and to document abuses against them!*

EDUCATING GIRLS AND BOYS ABOUT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

This October saw the release of a new co-educational curriculum for young people on ending violence against women and girls. Jointly developed by UN Women and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), the innovative *Voices against Violence* curriculum seeks to teach children and young people between the ages of 5 and 25 about violence and its root causes, as well as prevention and support mechanisms. For more information, see [link](#).

ADVOCATE! *Lobby for the “Voices against Violence” curriculum to be translated into your language and delivered in your country too!*

SOROPTIMISTS AT CSW 58

SIE will be participating in the 58th session of the Commission for the Status of Women (CSW) in New York this coming March.

CSW 58 will focus on *Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls*. Violence Against Women has until now not been one of the Millennium Development Goals but SIE is uniting with SI and UN Women, as well as many other NGOs, to ensure this pandemic is properly set on the future agenda.

A team is currently working on SIE’s presence at CSW 58. It will ensure the effective participation of our members and the wide dissemination of information about our Clubs and their work.

If interested to attend CSW 58 (at your own cost) and represent Soroptimist International of Europe at this important event, please let us know as soon as possible (and **no later than January 8**)! A few places could still be attributed to our members who would like to participate.

Stay tuned for more information about the 58th session of the Commission for the Status of Women in the next edition of Advocacy News!

INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY AWARDS

Femmes Africa Solidarité and Dr Denis Mukwege win Chirac Foundation Prize 2013

This year’s Chirac Foundation Conflict Prevention Prize was awarded to Dr. Denis Mukwege and the Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) NGO. Dr. Mukwege, an outstanding figure and tireless advocate for the rights of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and FAS, an NGO dedicated to promoting the conflict resolution and decision making capacities of women, were recognised for their, “exceptional dedication to women who have been victims of sexual violence [despite] the numerous risks [they] have had to endure”. Calling for the international community to help the DRC resolve its current situation, Dr. Mukwege continues to advocate for peace and for the rights of women in the DRC and beyond.

Malala Yousafzai wins Sakharov Prize 2013

On November 20, 2013 – Universal Children’s Day – the EU awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to 16-year-old Pakistani Malala Yousafzai. Advocating for girls’ access to education since the age of 11, Malala was not even deterred from her cause when she was brutally targeted and shot by the Taliban. Having recovered from her injuries, Malala continues her courageous fight for access to education for all. The European Parliament’s recognition through the Sakharov Prize of Malala’s exceptional commitment and bravery has significantly raised awareness of the challenges around girls’ education in some parts of the world. Malala can only be a source of inspiration for all Soroptimists.





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LET US INSPIRE YOU!

FOR A START...

We can ALL make a difference! Through sustained advocacy and awareness raising of women's and children's issues close to our hearts we can achieve **real and concrete change**. Your excellent projects are great advocates of change in and of themselves but more can always be done to change laws and to change mindsets! Here are some really simple ideas for advocacy and awareness raising that might help inspire you!

- **Organise events** to attract public attention, such as rallies, talks, lectures, candle-lit gatherings, or a human hand chains to raise awareness about a particular cause.
- **Invite the media and local authority officials** to attend Soroptimist events dedicated to particular women's issues.
- **Write an article** for The Link, for your local newspaper, or a national magazine on a particular issue of concern to women and children.
- **Fundraise** for a cause in creative ways.
- **Share materials others have made** such as documentary films with friends via email or Facebook or with the whole world on your Soroptimist Club/Union's website or on your personal blog.
- **Become a social media guru** and use Facebook, Twitter and other social media outlets to post thoughts, facts, photos, videos, articles, or mini-reports of key women's issues in your country or region; tell the world what your Club is doing to tackle these issues.
- **Join, partner or work with other organisations** who share the same or similar concerns to make your voices heard even farther afield.

And simply share. Share the good news about Soroptimism with family, friends and colleagues. Share issues you care about. Share information about the situation of women and children in your country or somewhere far away. They will be impressed, they will be touched. And they will spread the word further.

These few videos talk about some very serious women's issues in a concise and effective way. They might be a source of inspiration to you!

EWL video on combatting rape

Did you know that every day 205 women are raped in France? Did you know that every year there are 2,000 rapes in Denmark but that only 500 of those are reported to the police? EWL recently launched this [video](#) calling for European countries to mobilise against rape and to sign, ratify, and implement the Istanbul Convention.

What We Carry video

This recent [video](#) created by the Global Fund for Women contains a message we believe worth listening to! Take a look – it's only 2 minutes long.

SI video on Violence against Women and Girls

Soroptimist International produced this [video](#) on the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism against violence against women and girls. Take a look!

HAVE COMMENTS?

This is YOUR newsletter! If you have a comment, document, link, or anything else that you would like us to communicate in an upcoming edition of the newsletter, please share it with us! Feel free to send your news to programme@soroptimisteurope.org. The Advocacy Newsletter will come out four times per year.

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