

International Day of Peace on 21th September, 2015 - Soroptimist International of Europe and its 35'000 members call for ACTION.

International Peace day is approaching. It was established by the United Nations in 1981 and has since been marking this important day through thoughts, words, and deeds. It is a day “devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples”. This year commemoration is “Partnerships for Peace – Dignity for All” which aims to highlight the importance of all segments of society to work together to strive for peace.

As Soroptimists we are committed to work towards the achievement of sustainable peace and to support the promotion of effective methods of conflicts resolution EVERY DAY. Global peace is integral with a sustainable environment, the just sharing of natural resources, fair social and economic development and the promotion of human rights. We are also committed to the equal inclusion of women in all peace-making activities and the maintaining of that peace. Our Unions and clubs carry out projects across countries to promote tolerance, understanding and conflicts resolution.

Soroptimists hold global peace as one of our values. We also know that women and girls often bear the brunt of these violent conflicts – these conflicts which they rarely start, and rarely perpetuate. In times of war, women often constitute the majority of refugees and displaced persons, they suffer sexual violence, and they are targeted and terrorized for being women.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported on World Refugee Day (the 20th June this year) that the number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people worldwide has, for the first time in the post-II World War era, exceeded 50 million people and it is 6 million more than reported in 2012. Half of them are children.

According to UNHCR some 2,500 refugees and migrants are estimated to have died or gone missing this year while attempting the crossing to Europe – compared to 3,500 who died or went missing in the Mediterranean in 2014. The number, which includes almost 200,000 people landing in Greece and 110,000 in Italy, represents a substantial increase from last year. A large majority of people undertaking these arduous and dangerous journeys are refugees fleeing from places such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and some countries of the Horn of Africa. We have all seen the horrible and terrifying images of refugees in television, newspapers and other media that have broken our hearts. We are witness to no less than a human disaster and tragedy. How can this happen in 2015?

Soroptimist International of Europe strongly appeal to the European Union, the governments of the countries in the Middle East and the international community to take on responsibility and act NOW and find an agreement on how to help the overwhelming number of refugees in the countries affected in Europe and outside Europe mostly in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Those countries have embraced millions of refugees especially coming from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. The refugees have to be able to live under humane conditions until they can return to the country they fled from or before they move on to their final destination. SIE appeals to all governments involved to provide comprehensive responses and act with humanity and in accordance with their international obligations. This is a human tragedy that requires a determined collective political response. It is a crisis of solidarity, not a crisis of numbers.

All the European countries, and the international community must act together in response to the growing emergency and demonstrate responsibility and solidarity. At the very least, International Day of Peace should be an occasion for each one of us to reflect, alone and with others, about the direction our world is going in. As Soroptimists, we should especially ask what more we can do to alleviate the suffering of women and children in times of war.

Our effort in post-conflict situations is of long-term character. We, Soroptimists are determined to develop and realize a large-scale and sustainable projects targeting women and children focusing on education, economic

empowerment and health security meaning both physical and psychological health. Help is needed for women and children who have been victims of violence and/or who have witnessed violence during conflict.

The mass immigration is a symptom of deeper problems. In just a few days, the United Nations will adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the new vision for building a world of dignity for all. The sustainable development goals will hopefully offer a holistic approach to economic, social and environmental advancement. This is also central to preventing conflicts and nurturing a culture of peace and it is essential that governments live up to the obligations they agree too.

We concur the statement of UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki-moon about this year's Peace Day "Let us stand with the millions of people across the world who are suffering the devastating impact of violence and conflict. Let us share ideas and plans for helping and supporting them in their time of dire need."

I appeal to each and one of you to push your governments to act in the name of Peace and humanity and let us join hands and act.

In friendship,
Ulla Madsen
SIE President 2013-2015

