



8th March 2015 – 35,000 Soroptimists call for educating, empowering and enabling women!

Soroptimist International of Europe is a service organisation that speaks on behalf of **35,000 women** from, across **59 countries in Europe, the Middle East and Africa**. Since 1921, Soroptimists have united around the principles of educating, empowering and enabling women and girls locally, nationally and internationally.

Gender inequality today still comes in many shapes and forms. Women and girls still constitute the majority of the world's illiterate people. Girls are still not equally represented in secondary and tertiary education. Women and girls are still less likely to own property and own the land they work on. Women and girls are still more likely to be poor. And women and girls, from disadvantaged and privileged backgrounds alike, continue to be the vast majority of victims of domestic and intimate partner violence, which exacerbates all of the problems listed above.

As a daily witness of many different forms of inequality suffered by women around the world, with one voice we support the call made by the United Nations and UN Women on the occasion of March 8th, International Women's Day, this year: **"Empowering Women - Empowering Humanity: Picture It!"**

Achieving gender equality is a cross-cutting issue that requires the commitment of Governments. Soroptimists call for a global increase in political will so as to confront gender inequality. Since the creation of the **Beijing Platform for Action**, Soroptimists have played a role in its implementation, and are taking action on to fight different forms of violence committed against women and girls, to empower women to take on positions as leaders and decision makers, and create opportunities for women and girls' access to education. To promote change, we use the Soroptimist model: **Educate, Empower, Enable**. We must listen to women to effect the change they need.

As a Global voice for women, Soroptimist International brings a bottom-up perspective to this Beijing+20 Review, and proposes that they must be given maximum consideration:

- **Violence Committed Against Women and Girls**

Forms of violence against women such as domestic violence, female genital mutilation, forced and early marriage, trafficking, sexual violence and femicide prevail. In the wake of Beijing, government responses to VAWG have focused on adopting legislation that criminalizes certain forms of violence and in creating national action plans to combat violence. In order for solutions to be effective, the voices of women and girls, survivors must be included in policy development and implementation. This way, women and girls' nuanced and multifaceted experiences are acknowledged and serve to inform policies aimed at preserving their rights and dignity.

- **Women as Leaders and Decision Makers**

Women are still underrepresented in positions of power and influence, at community, national and international levels. The participation of women and girls must be seen as a cross cutting issue and the voices of women and girls must be a part of policy setting at *every* level on *all* issues, not just those labelled as 'women's issues'. Including women as leaders and decision makers empowers them not only as individuals but as equal partners in a just, equitable and inclusive world

- **Access to Education for Women and Girls**

Gender stereotypes that are enforced by societies continue to create a world where women and girls are barred from achieving their fullest potential. Quality, safe, affordable and lifelong education is crucial to the empowerment of women and girls as individuals and as members of their communities.



These core areas of concern for Soroptimists, women and girls are still as present today, as they were 20 years ago. They must not be present in 20 years' time. The Beijing Platform for Action and the Post-2015 Development Agenda need to cohere in order to bring an end to gender inequality in all its forms. Therefore, Soroptimists call on member governments to take action to educate, empower and enable women and girls. We must all continue to look at the world through women's eyes.