



The Link

A global voice for women

4/2008-2009 N° 215



*SI/E Water Congress
Days That
Make Us Proud!*

*The Changing of the Guard
Interview with Mariet Verhoef-
Cohen and Eliane Lagasse*

*Hanne Jensbo
Meet the New
SI President*

Soroptimist International (SI) is a worldwide organisation for women in management and professions, working through service projects to build a better world for women and children. There are currently over 90,000 members in more than 3,000 clubs in 124 countries.

Soroptimist International of Europe (SII/E) is one of four federations of Soroptimist International. It has over 35,000 members in more than 1,230 clubs in 57 countries.

Soroptimists inspire action and create opportunities to transform the lives of women and girls through a global network of members and international partnerships. Please consult our website at www.soroptimisteurope.org for more information about the aims, activities and projects that characterise our organisation.

Note from the Editorial Staff

THE BIGGEST ISSUE EVER!

With far less than 100 completed questionnaires, the response to our survey on The Link was disappointing. It would be difficult to decide on any major changes based on so few opinions. However, the good news is that the style and content of The Link are widely seen as an improvement so we are moving in the right direction. The biggest drawbacks to more subscriptions appear to be a lack of time and the language barrier. We are happy to see that nearly all those who responded feel that the subscription fee is reasonable.

The increased popularity of The Link has one very evident consequence. The number of contributions we are receiving from Clubs and Unions has risen significantly. This is a gratifying development, and we are extremely pleased to see the enthusiasm expressed by our readers. But please check the deadlines, which are published on the back page of the previous issue. We cannot always make exceptions in including your articles when they are submitted long beyond this date.

As you can see, the fourth issue of The Link in the 2007-2009 biennium has more pages than normal. There is so much to re-

port, and we felt it was important to include everything. Let us know what you think!

Contents

SI/E Water Congress	4
2009 Governors' Meeting	6
Best Practice Awards	8
SI Board Meeting	9
The Changing of the Guard	10
Interview with Hanne Jensbo	12
SI President's Appeal	13
50/50 Democracy	14
CEDAW	15
Leadership Commitment	16
Water Projects	18
Federation News	22
News from Unions and Clubs	26

Cover page



SI/E President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen presented the Water Best Practice Award and a cheque to Mbolatiana Razakarisoa, President of Club Antananarivo Mandrosoa in Madagascar.

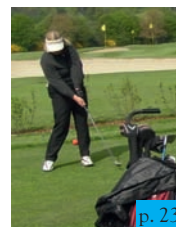
Photo: An Stalpers



p. 6



p. 15



p. 23

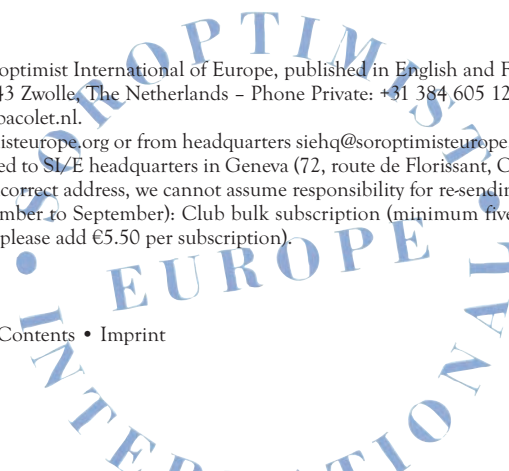


p. 20



p. 27

The Link 4/2008-2009, N° 215. Quarterly magazine of Soroptimist International of Europe, published in English and French
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 Subscription forms are available on the SI/E website www.soroptimisteurope.org or from headquarters siehq@soroptimisteurope.org. A reminder to subscribers (individual or clubs): any change of address should be communicated to SI/E headquarters in Geneva (72, route de Florissant, CH - 1206 Geneva, Fax: +41 22 789 04 43). If undelivered magazines are returned because of an incorrect address, we cannot assume responsibility for re-sending.
 Subscription rates (four issues per Soroptimist year starting December to September): Club bulk subscription (minimum five) €10.00 per subscription per language. Individual subscription per language €12.50 (for airmail please add €5.50 per subscription).





SI/E President Mariet riding to the gala dinner of SI in Denmark – and not into the sunset!

Dear Soroptimists,

It seems like yesterday that I sat down to write my first President's Letter and now, after two very interesting, rewarding and challenging years, I find myself writing my last official message. I had a myriad of intentions and expectations, but quickly learned that one cannot realise everything in one biennium. The two years have flown by in a flash!

Obviously, I set myself certain concrete goals during my presidency. Thanks to the untiring support of my Board and SI/E HQ, many of them have been achieved. We redesigned the SI/E website, adding video clips and more up-to-date information. The Link has been modernised and provides a wealth of background details, fascinating success stories and general tips. I am happy to see that more Soroptimists have chosen to subscribe to our Federation magazine. Indeed, members now have a lot more SI/E literature for PR purposes, many of which are downloadable from the website. Through our presence on networking platforms and blogs, we are reaching a younger audience and communicating better and faster across borders.

For the first time ever, the SI/E Board produced a policy plan outlining the work it set out to accomplish. At the end of my term, we came up with a Strategic Plan for SI/E, which I feel is an important tool for future SI/E Boards. You will hear more about this in the future. Our relationship with Women for Water Partnership was initiated during my biennium. We have benefited tremendously from their grants – both for our water projects and our capacity-building work. With this issue of The Link, you will receive a copy of the so-called Leadership Commitment, which was distributed at the Governors' Meeting in July 2009. Although it is not a binding agreement, it is meant to be a guideline for our dealings with one another and reminds us that in order to attain our goals, we must work together and not against each other. We do not and will not always agree, but mutual respect is essential in our workings.

SI/E Congress was a highpoint

Of course, the crowning event of my biennium was SI/E Congress in Amsterdam. I cannot begin to say how much work it involved for me and the Organising Committee, but those of you who were there will, I hope, agree that it was worth it. The speakers were very different, and each was inspiring in his or her own way. Please take the time to look at the video clips on our website. We can be extremely proud of our Federation and what it has accomplished under the motto, 'Soroptimists go for Water'. I thank and praise each and every one of you who has contributed to these projects. Not all projects resulted in a PFR, so I am sure that we have nearly reached the one million euro mark in the total funding of SI/E water projects in these two years.

I am particularly pleased that incoming SI/E President Eliane Lagasse will continue with the water theme during her presidency, and incoming SI/E President elect Kathy Kaaf plans to do the same. Through our successful projects in Europe and Africa, we have helped establish a reputation for our Federation among organisations dealing with water issues, such as the UN and the Council of Europe. By making water our focus over four more years, we will raise our visibility even higher and thus attract more interest for our objectives. I feel confident that this success will also encourage more young women to join our organisation, as this generation is acutely aware of the global environmental problems we face.

Many thanks for your support

May I close this letter with a big thank-you to all of you who have helped me so much during these past two years. It has been a pleasure serving you and SI/E. I have been extremely motivated by the many wonderful hours talking to fellow Soroptimists and hearing about your involvement and commitment. You have been a great inspiration to me, and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to lead your organisation. I wish Eliane the best of success for her biennium and pledge my support in all her efforts to build a better world for women and girls.



Mariet

Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, SI/E President

Soroptimists go for
water

DAYS THAT MAKE US PROUD

SI/E Water Congress in Amsterdam



Mistress of Ceremonies on Sunday and author of this article: Ann-Christine Söderlund is also well known for her clever limerics.

In the context of the SI/E Congress culminating SI/E President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen's biennium of ambitious and successful water projects, 'You cannot wish for something better than to be an Amsterdammer,' says Swedish Soroptimist Ann-Christine Söderlund. The following is her personal account of the extremely interesting and well-organised Congress in July 2009.



Valdete Idrizi, one of the founders of Community Building Mitrovica working in Kosovo, is the winner of the Soroptimist Peace Prize 2009.

This was a congress that really had it all! And I say so with some assertiveness, after having attended many international meetings, both in our organisation and in others. But then, HOW do you describe such a successful congress, without piling the superlatives on top of each other? Well, since I am writing this in August, still in my capacity as a Federation Programme Co-ordinator, I thought it would be nice to use the six classic Programme Areas of Soroptimist International as a frame, when trying to describe my feelings about the Congress days in Amsterdam:

Human Rights/Status of Women are core values in our organisation and the underlying theme with many of the speakers. Whether the talk was on poverty, water, sanitation, economy or leadership, women were always in the foreground, and I was deeply moved by expressions like 'poverty has a woman's face'; 'women have no voice and no choice', but also pleased by 'yes - women can!'

Health and Environment, of course, go hand in hand: Women, water and sanitation are the context of Millennium Development Goal 7 - this is a giant undertaking even for us who are better off than most. 70% of the world's poor live in rural areas, and women and girls are exceptionally burdened by a lack of water and sanitation. We pollute our air, land and sea carelessly and incessantly, and conveniently forget that the expression total sanitation means such things as environmental cleanliness, hand washing, garbage removal and waste water disposal... Providing another 365 million persons access to sanitation by 2015 would cost less than one percent of the world's military spending in 2005!

Education and Culture - when it comes to learning, I wish I could remember all the interesting facts and figures from many of the outstanding speakers. For instance, when oceanographer and environmentalist Fabien Cousteau reminded us that WE are the caretakers of our planet and then



Far left: The candle ceremony in the main hall of 'Het Muziektheater' in Amsterdam (left) was performed by (from left) SI President Margaret Lobo, SI/E President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, Dutch Union President Akke Timmermans-Kuiken and SI/E Immediate Past President Monique Riviere. Photos: An Stalpers and Bea Rabe

told us what a thrown-away cell-phone battery can destroy in terms of the environment! We were also reminded by Sylvia Borren, Co-Chair of the Global Call to Action against Poverty, that 45 million girls today still have no schooling...but that the world, in terms of **Economic and Social Development**, with a little bit of investment in educating girls and more support for micro-enterprises would enable women and girls to work their way out of poverty! Once again our governments and our authorities have a great responsibility in looking into where the money goes!

The feeling of **International Goodwill & Understanding**, of course, permeated the whole event and I say so with pride since it is MY programme area!! Where else do you meet people from all over the world; where else do you listen to a 'Babylonian language mixture' in every corner and where else do you make so many new friends during a single weekend? And on top of it all, where else can you listen to ocean explorers, UN directors, computer specialists, researchers, climate experts and even get a real professional lecturer's (thank you, Sylvia Borren!) tips on a chanting slogan when demonstrating for important causes: Water – Sanitation – Food – Health – Education!

Back in Sweden, I asked a Norwegian friend what she remembered most about the congress and she said, 'the professionalism of it all, the warmth with which we were received and the interesting theme workshops we participated in!' I also asked my Swedish Union President and she replied that she had come back with 'a new look at existing problems and I was very up-lifted by meeting all these vital and strong women in our organisation!'

The congress in Amsterdam made us proud of the fantastic organisation we have, so let us all do our utmost to bring it forward in every respect. As a final homage to the organisers and as a symbol for the warmth, the professionalism and the strong women of our organisation, I quote the words I heard for the first time during the Dutch hospitality evening and which you can see in the head-line above: *Niemand kan zich beter wensen, dann een Amsterdammer te zijn...*

To hear or read some of the speeches given at the Congress, please consult the SI/E website at www.soroptimisteurope.org

Ann-Christine (Stina) Söderlund
SI/E Programme Co-ordinator 2007-2009
International Goodwill & Understanding

Lottery at the SI/E Congress

KUULIUS GO FOR WATER

The winning numbers of the lottery 'KUULIUS go for Water' are 182, 3337 and 5677. The owner of ticket number 3337 has come forward. Maria Luisa Frosio of Club Milano alla Scala/Italy is the happy winner of 'Rijritta', one of three sculptures donated by Editha Pröbstle of Club Koblenz, Germany. If you have a ticket with one of the other winning numbers, please contact Gerda Huisman at info@soroptimistsgoforwater. The proceeds of the lottery will go to a water project. For more information about Editha's art, please see her website at <http://editha.net>.



Editha Pröbstle of Club Koblenz kindly donated her 'KUULIUS' sculptures for the lottery at the SI/E Congress in Amsterdam.

NEW SI/E BOARD ELECTED

The city of Amsterdam played host to this year's Governors' Meeting on the 8th and 9th July 2009. Besides an extensive list of amendments that were, with one exception, approved, the new SI/E Board was up for election.



Above: SI/E President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen summed up the activities of her biennium which she had laid down two years ago in her Policy Plan. Below right: Incoming SI/E President Eliane Lagasse introduces her new Board whom the Governors had just elected.

Photos: Bea Rabe

SI/E President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen expertly chaired the Meeting and was assisted by her Board. The elections of the new SI/E Board topped the agenda. Kathy Kaaf (German Union) was elected SI/E President 2011-2013 and will thus be SI/E President elect as from 1st October 2009. Please see the adjacent box for the other positions.

All of the appointments were confirmed and will be published on the SI/E website: www.soroptimisteurope.org. The entire list of Agenda Items and the various reports were accepted by the Governors. For detailed information on the amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws, please contact your governors or delegate.

Seventeen applications for grants from the Action Fund had been received and evaluated on the basis of specific criteria. Of these, the Board

proposed thirteen allocations, which were accepted by the Governors. A total amount € 56,800 will be allocated for the 2009-2010 Action Fund grants.

The Scholarship Committee Chairperson provided detailed information about the scholarship applications the Committee had received and presented the 2009-2010 proposed Scholarship Grants suggested by the Board for the approval of the Governors. Twelve scholarships were awarded for a total of € 69,550.

After an interesting and enlightening training led by Machteld Pel on the subject of sustainable leadership (see The Link No. 214), SI/E President Mariet explained the idea behind the newly presented Leadership Commitment (see pages 16-17).

The next Governors' Meeting will be held in Ghent, Belgium, on 3rd and 4th July 2010.





In addition to the election of Kathy Kaaf as SI/E President 2011-2013, the Governors decided on the following 2009-2011 SI/E Board under the leadership of incoming SI/E President Eliane Lagasse:

- >>> SI/E Vice Presidents
1st Vice President: Ulla Madsen (Danish Union)
 Daniella Stern (Israeli Union)
 Boguslawa Kalita (Polish Union)
 Rina Dupriet (French Union)
- >>> SI/E Programme Director
 Ulrike Neubert (Kenyan Union)
- >>> SI/E Assistant Programme Director
 Ann-Christine Söderlund (Swedish Union)

The following SI/E Technical Committees have been elected:

- >>> Constitution and By-Laws Committee
Chairperson: Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis (Italian Union)
Members:
 Lis Ehmer Olesen (Danish Union)
 Françoise Morvant (Swiss Union)
- >>> Finance Controller
 Hafdis Karlsdottir (Icelandic Union)
- >>> Scholarship Committee:
Chairperson: Anabeth Stüder (Swiss Union)
Members:
 Gerd Wold Goddard (Norwegian Union) re-election
 Nelleke Fontein (Dutch Union)
- >>> Extension Committee
Chairperson: Nilgün Ozler (Turkish Union)
Members:
 Tonny Filedt Kok Weimar (Dutch Union)
 Leena Viitaniemi (Finnish Union) re-election

The Governors decided on a number of resolutions on the first day of the meeting in Amsterdam.



In May 2009, SI/E decided to apply for its own NGO status with ECOSOC (UN Economic & Social Council). There are many reasons for this step: For one, SI/E seeks a more active participation in the United Nations, which is significant to gender-focused NGOs. This status will offer SI/E the opportunity to attend more UN sessions such as: the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Commission on the Status of Women, various UN Committees and many other vital UN events. The Federation will be able to monitor regular UN information and react to these with a unified voice through the official and permitted use of UN NGO written and oral statements.

With this NGO status, SI/E will also be allowed to organise parallel events, such as panels, whenever we feel the need to do so. And finally, having UN ECOSOC NGO Status will open opportunities for SI/E to expand our existing network. It is essential in order to keep NGO boards, advisors and donors informed about our progress related to our programmes.

SI/E is recognised as an NGO through the SI umbrella organisation and is committed to remain unified with all other federations on this UN front. However, as SI/E grows, we believe that the time has come for the federation to provide greater opportunities to its members by gaining its own accreditation. This opens more possibilities to a larger number of SI/E members to represent their federation at UN events and to become a stronger voice within the UN.

During the last GM in Amsterdam, SI president Margaret Lobo said she welcomed SI/E's initiative. SIA has also applied for its own NGO status with ECOSOC, and the SI/E Board are excited at future collaboration in attending these meetings.

The application process is quite long, but SI/E HQ expects to receive the official decision by spring 2010.

With UN ECOSOC NGO Status, SI/E will be able to participate more actively in the United Nations.



NGO STATUS FOR SI/E



The 'Au Rayon de Soleil' orphanage, sponsored by Italian and African clubs, provides shelter, education and health care to girls in Togo.

Here are the winners for each Programme Focus Objective:

- >> Objective 1
Eliminate poverty and gender discrimination through ensuring women's full social and economic rights
'Orphanage au Rayon de Soleil', realised by Clubs Milano Alla Scala and Milano Fondatore in Italy and Club Lomé Agape in Togo
- >> Objective 2
End human trafficking and all forms of violence against women and children
'Hope is a Waking Dream – A Decent Life for Young Women in Moldova', realised by the Union of Norway
- >> Objective 3
Ensure access to health care for women and children
'Un Cocon Pour Mieux Grandir', realised by the Union of France
- >> Objective 4
Support programmes and policies that eliminate HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and other major diseases
'Luxor – support for setting up a clinic', realised by Club Chianciano-Montepulciano, Italy
- >> Objective 5
Improve access to clean water, sanitation and essential food resources
'Israeli Water Project', realised by the Union of Israel
- >> Objective 6
Mitigate the effects of climate change and integrate sustainability into personal choices and government policies and programmes
'Go for Water – Team with the Stream', realised by Club Brasov, Romania
- >> Objective 7
Meet the needs of women and children during and after armed conflicts and disasters
'Women's Meeting Place (Frauentreff)', realised by Club Kiel, Germany
- >> Objective 8
Promote peaceful conflict resolution, inter-cultural and inter-racial tolerance and condemn genocide and terrorism
'Water and Power Strategies in the Jordan Region', realised by Club Lucca, Italy
- >> Objective 9
Ensure equal access to education and training for women and girls throughout their lifespan
'Immigrant Women', realised by Club Bærum, Norway
- >> Objective 10
Assure women's advancement in management, politics and decision-making
'Women and Development', realised by Club Milano Alla Scala, Italy

SI/E Best Practice Awards

BOARD HONOURS



A so-called cocoon was designed to give premature babies a chance to grow in conditions similar to those enjoyed by a baby born full term. So far French clubs have funded 850 cocoons for use in hospitals and clinics at a cost of € 60,000.

The winners of the first SI/E Best Practice Awards for the outstanding projects in each of the ten Programme Focus Objectives were honoured during the Governors' Meeting in Amsterdam on 8th July 2009. The Selection Committee – comprising the SI/E Programme Liaison, six Programme Coordinators and SI/E Programme Officer – had the very difficult task of evaluating the 57 projects nominated by the Unions and Single Clubs. It is very impressive to see the admirable work done by our members. Next year, the Programme Team will establish new guidelines and criteria for the selection of the nominees for the Best Practice Awards by the Unions and Single Clubs. For example, they will be allowed to submit a maximum of two projects for each Objective. In Amsterdam, the ten winners received their certificates from the respective Programme Coordinators. A brochure featuring the winners was also published in time for the Governors' Meeting. For more information on the winning projects, please download the brochure under www.soroptimisteurope.org.

PROJECT EXCELLENCE



BOARD MEETING IN HILLERØD, DENMARK

The SI Board Meeting in Hillerød was marked by the Change of Insignia at the beautiful historic Frederiksborg castle to welcome our new SI President Hanne Jensbo to her biennium 2009-2011. The impressive setting of the castle across the Slotso lake added value to this memorable event. Intriguing discussions, captivating procedures, friendly conversations and laughter were all part of the SI Board Meeting which was held from 1st-4th August.

Ireland and Soroptimist International of South West Pacific, the main goal of this meeting was to ventilate a possible working relationship between SIA and SI/E through Programme that would eventually extend to all of the SI Federations. The governance structure, strategic goal, programme goals, capabilities and resources available to both federations were discussed. All parties were confident that this would facilitate the efficacy of our organisation.

SI/E was represented by all three voting delegates, the SI/E Executive Officer along with a large group of Silent Observers. SI/E welcomed SI President Hanne's decision to choose 'Hopes and Dreams for Everyone' as her December 10th President's Appeal. Initiated by the Union of Norway and Clubs in Moldova, the project helps protect vulnerable Moldovan girls with life-skills education and sustainable living conditions and particularly to save them from human trafficking (see page 13).

Overall, the SI Board Meeting and the SIA and SI/E discussions in Denmark were highly productive, especially because it provided an open forum to discuss important strategic issues and the future of our organisation.

The participants particularly enjoyed the last day at the Board Meeting, when Consultant Glenn Tecker reviewed the progress of the federations on the SI strategic plan, adopted in 2008. The aim of this meeting was to strengthen the bond between all federations and to align their future goals. His workshop was highly appreciated; it was thought provoking, interesting, as well as humorous, which facilitated everyone's ability to address matters of disagreement open-mindedly. As the attendees were so enthusiastic about Glenn's contribution, SI President Hanne decided to ask him back for the next SI Board Meeting in London.

In a similar exercise, Glenn assisted the discussions during the collaborative meeting between Soroptimist International of the Americas and Soroptimist International of Europe. Also attended by the Past Presidents of Soroptimist International of Great Britain and



The three voting members (from left) Immediate Past President Monique Riviere, President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen and President elect Eliane Lagasse represented SI/E at the SI Board Meeting in Denmark. Former SI/E President Hanne Jensbo (left) officially succeeded Margaret Lobo as SI President at the Board Meeting in Hillerød.



THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Mariet Verhoef-Cohen's biennium 2007-2009 comes to an end on 30th September, and as of 1st October 2009, Eliane Lagasse will be the new President of our European Federation. They have worked closely in these two years, thus ensuring a smooth transition. Here they share some thoughts about the past and the future biennium, respectively.

What is the biggest challenge facing a Federation President, Mariet?

The biggest challenge is managing your time as President, especially if you are still working, because you are really coping with two full-time jobs. Nevertheless, as we are an organisation of professional women, I think the SI/E Board should consist mainly of working women. To help resolve the time issue, we should ensure that HQ in Geneva is well staffed with professional personnel.

What, in your opinion, was your Board's greatest accomplishment in the past two years, Mariet?

Restructuring our Headquarters in Geneva with a new executive officer, a new project manager and a new bookkeeper was an important step. Working closely with the SI/E Board, they have started a new website with video clips, blogs and better accessibility. This has made SI/E more professional and more visible. The SI/E Board also laid down the first policy plan to show the Governors what they could expect in my biennium and to enable them to determine whether targets had been met. During the GMs we introduced training sessions, thus giving participants an added value.

Mariet, what was the most memorable moment in your presidency?

Many of my experiences during these two years were memorable, not least all of the Soroptimists I met! But probably the most important single event was



Mariet

the Congress, when it became clear that there were so many water projects and enthusiastic members who were eager to support our theme of Soroptimists go for water. It was amazing that in a short period of 18 months we invested over € 800,000 in Water Projects, and the awareness of water issues in all the countries of our Federation has been overwhelming. This showed the world that Soroptimists really can make a difference.

Have you got any special advice for your successor?

Not really, I am sure she will be a very capable president. One should be open to new developments for our organisation. SI/E has to keep growing and we only can increase our membership if we become more professional and younger, so we are going in the right direction, but we have to continue to modernise.



Eliane

Transparency is also very important, and we should continue the open communication with our members.

Eliane, you have decided to carry on with the water theme for your biennium. What prompted you to make this decision?

Water-related problems are a constantly growing concern for the global community, and women and children are the most affected. Every day thousands of people die, most of them small children, of illnesses caused by contaminated water and malnutrition as a result of prolonged drought, just to name two problems. In most societies women have the primary responsibility for household water management. A study by the International Water and Sanitation Centre found that water projects designed and run with the full participation of women are

more sustainable and effective. Soroptimists are in a perfect position to initiate and oversee projects locally.

What can Soroptimists do to alleviate the problems?

There is no shortage of projects, but often money is lacking. That is why I plan to start the EEP, the Experience Exchange Pool. With fundraising due to become more difficult, I invite all Soroptimists to invest their time and experience in projects. We must fully use all resources we have at our disposal and not the least our 35,000 members and their many skills. The Project Exchange Pool (PEP) and our water website with webmasters Ina Stoppelberg and Gerda Rosiers, SI/E Programme Officer at HQ Suba Parthiban, Roswitha Ott and Maria Soumonni, both responsible for Africa, are ready to help you as well.

Have you planned any other focal points?

Sadly, one often finds that women leaders are the worst enemies of talented young women. SI/E will prove this wrong. With our mentoring project, started by the German Union and soon to be expanded to more Unions, we will support young women with leadership skills and help them along their career journey. The mentoring project requires a certain amount of funding, but essentially it is about giving your time and professional expertise. Being a member of an international organisation with 90,000 members is having access to a huge network, which we can and should use in our professional life.

So, SI is about projects and partnership?

Women of all generations and in every position should realise that they have the potential to be each others strongest allies and that they must show their solidarity, beyond any difference in origin or background. Soroptimist International is not only about project work; it is also about friendship and tolerance. Our diversity is our strength, so we should accept different opinions and be able to discuss them without conflicts. I hope that, together, we will make my biennium productive and positive for SI/E.

ACTION SPEAKS LOUDER THAN WORDS

The Board Meeting in Hillerød was the venue for the change of insignia, when Danish Soroptimist and former SI/E President Hanne Jensbo succeeded Margaret Lobo, SI/SWP, as SI President. We spoke to Hanne about her future plans.

How has your experience as a former SI/E President helped to prepare you for your new responsibility as SI President?

Since my first job with SI/E at the beginning of the nineties as Follow-up for Eastern Europe, I have felt a special need to work on women's issues. Over the years, I have met many women in Eastern Europe and Africa who have said that Soroptimism has changed their lives. THAT has been an enormous inspiration for me.

What inspired you to take on the challenge of SI President?

It is my wish to motivate my Soroptimist sisters and encourage them to develop projects for women who live in poverty and have a hard life.

I see this as my biggest challenge. I hope to be able to inspire and motivate Soroptimists to further contribute to the empowerment of women all over the world.

What priorities have you set for your term of office?

I wish to make Soroptimist International more visible, to give each member the feeling that she is an ambassador of an international network of women, to develop leadership and to have lots of fun, activities and friendship among members. My personal motto for my presidency is 'Action Speaks Louder than Words'.

What are SI's greatest weaknesses and greatest strengths?

Our biggest weakness is the lack of communication between members at all levels. It is also the lack of communication with regards to all the important projects Soroptimists are implementing all over the world. It would give SI much greater visibility, if everyone was better informed about what we are doing.

Our greatest strength is our internationality with respect to the individual identity and culture, as well as our representation at the UN and EU.

Have you decided what your President's Appeal will be?

The SI December 10th President's Appeal 2009 is called 'Hopes and Dreams for Everyone', which is a project to prevent human trafficking from Moldova by providing life-skill education and sustainable living conditions for vulnerable children (see adjacent page for more details). I hope for big donations from European Soroptimists for this very important project, which was initiated by our Norwegian sisters.

How do you see the future role of SI?

In my opinion, Soroptimism needs an umbrella to link the four federations and its members in order to give guidance to the programmes and to the UN representatives and to speak on behalf of all members. Who else can take on this task, if not SI?



SI President Hanne Jensbo has chosen 'Hopes and Dreams for Everyone' as her President's Appeal 2009 on 10th December 2009. It is the continuation of a project that the Norwegian Union successfully carried out with the SI clubs in Moldova from 2005 until 2009.

Until its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991, the Republic of Moldova was an affluent country, now it is one of the poorest in Europe. 80 % of the country is farmland. Since there is no industry to speak of, an estimated number of 500,000 people are forced to work and live abroad in order to support their families at home.

Mainly because of this prevalent poverty, women and girls are widely exposed to trafficking. Among the most exposed are young girls who live in small villages, mainly with their grandparents. Even more vulnerable are girls who – for different reasons – live at boarding schools. By the age of sixteen, however, they are out of the school system, left alone, often with no place to live. From the 68 boarding schools in Moldova four were chosen to

sponsor. The project is set up so that it can easily be transferred to other schools and regions. The programme consists of: Life-skill education to further social integration, career guidance and counseling, communication skills, health care, sexual education and domestic violence. It also includes basic skills such as how to renovate a room, keep account, and others.

The project will continue to be professionally executed in partnership with the 'International Organization for Migration' (IOM) and 'The Child Rights Information Center' (CRIC), Moldova. In addition, the three Moldavian Soroptimist clubs are supporting the project locally.

The results speak for themselves: During the four years of the Norwegian project more than 300 girls from age 13 to 16 attended life-skill education courses, thirty girls received support through high school/college and nine social assistants were trained.

An independent evaluation report confirmed the success of the project and recommended continuation. This extremely positive result is why SI President Hanne has chosen this project. So, please support the December 10th President's Appeal!

>>President's Appeal 2009<<

MOLDOVA HOPES AND DREAMS FOR EVERYONE

This excellent project allows us to help young girls pursue their dreams, thus protecting them from the threat of being trafficked.

>>Southern England<<

APPLY FOR GRANT OF FRIENDSHIP

SI of Southern England Region invites a Soroptimist to share and exchange experiences for three to four weeks from mid June to mid July 2010.

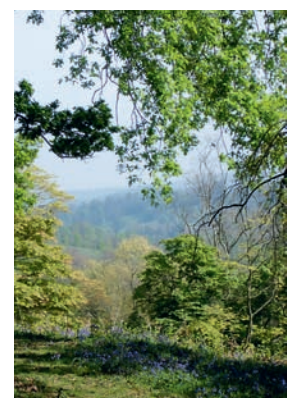
The region covers the county of Hampshire, parts of Dorset, Surrey and Sussex, and part of Greater London. It has multicultural diversity and is an economic hub of the country. The area is well known for stately homes, beautiful countryside, cathedral cities and a unique coastline.

A programme will be arranged to allow the applicant to visit places of interest, learn more

about the Programme Action work being undertaken in the region and the UK as a whole and meet members of the 13 clubs in the region.

The successful applicant will be required to give a presentation at the region's Council meeting, submit a formal report of her visit and undertake post-visit liaison for up to three years. She must cover her own return fare to the UK. Hospitality will be provided in members' homes and transport together with entrance fees and meals will be provided during her stay. She should provide her own spending money. Preference will be given to someone who has never visited the UK. Good knowledge of spoken and written English is essential. Information about the region and its clubs is on www.soroptimist-gbi.co.uk/southern-england/.

Please contact Rita Renton at rita@deeray.co.uk for an application form. Closing date for completed applications is 12th December 2009.



Winkworth Arboretum near Godalming is just one of the possible venues one can expect to see.

The European Women's Lobby '50/50 Campaign for Democracy' was launched in September 2008. Its goals are to promote greater involvement of women in European politics, to achieve equal representation of women and men in EU decision-making bodies and to put issues of equality between women and men at the core of European policies.

The conference aimed at answering these questions through a panel of very prominent women politicians and representatives of the Spanish and Belgian Governments (the countries to be European Council Presidents in 2010).

In addition, the results of the recent European Parliamentary Elections were analysed from a gender equality perspective. These elections showed slight progress in the representation of women in the European Parliament (EP). Women now constitute about 35% (compared with some 31% at the beginning of the 2004-2009 term) of the EMPs, which is nowhere near the parity or even the 40% of women threshold agreed to by Member States of the Council of Europe.

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission and strong supporter of the 50/50 Campaign, said: 'The European parliament elections are now behind us, but the work is not yet over. I know some people think quotas should only be applied at fishing and whales, but I don't agree. I think the only way to restore what is today a de facto discrimination against women, is to introduce gender quotas across Europe.'

The 50/50 campaign also strives to achieve equal representation of women in leadership positions in the European Parliament, the new European Commission and other top EU posts. The EWL has produced sample lobbying letters aiming to help increase the representation of women in the internal EU decision-making posts.

Soroptimists may translate and adapt these letters and send them to your respective governments. Decisions in this regard are being made right now and for the coming five years! Please find more information on the websites: www.womenlobby.org, www.5050democracy.eu and www.soroptimisteurope.org/en/news/newsletter.html.

Bea Rabe
SI/E Representative to the EWL

50/50 CAMPAIGN FOR DEMOCRACY

Addressing participants at the EWL conference from left to right: Isabelle Durant, VP of the European Parliament (2009-2014), Margot Wallström, VP of the European Commission (2004-2009) and Brigitte Thieme, President European Women's Lobby.



On the eve of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) General Assembly, the EWL held a very successful public conference titled 'No Modern European Democracy without Gender Equality' on 26th June 2009 in Brussels, Belgium.

The main topics were:

- * What is the place of women in the European Parliament after the European elections of June 2009?
- * What are the perspectives for chairing European Parliament committees?
- * What can we do for an equal representation of women and men in the future European Commission and the nomination for the much coveted 'EU top jobs'?

This year, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the historic bill of rights for women, marks its 30th anniversary. On 18th December 1979 the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention, codifying comprehensive international legal standards for women. It entered into force in September 1981. 186 countries have since ratified the treaty, making it a binding instrument of law for these State parties. The Convention consists of a preamble and 30 articles which define all forms of discrimination against women and establish an agenda for national governments to end this bias.

Defining discrimination

Discrimination against women is defined as ‘any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field’ (Article 1). Ratification signifies a commitment of the States to take appropriate measures (a) to incorporate the principle of the equality of men and women in their national legal system, (b) to adopt apt legislative measures proscribing all discrimination against women, (c) to enact special tribunals to ensure the efficient protection of women against discrimination, (d) to abolish all existing discriminatory laws.

In addition, CEDAW elaborates on women’s human rights in their political and public life, including the right to education, health, employment, property ownership as well the right to vote and to stand for election. It is the only human rights instrument to address the issue of reproductive rights of women. States also pledge to submit a national report every four years. Unfortunately, many State parties are clearly not meeting their responsibilities. As a result, a Committee was established in 1982 to oversee the implementation of the Convention.

How can Soroptimists help?

As representatives of an international women’s NGO, Soroptimists can contribute to the work of the Committee by being a voice for women. Under the Optional Protocol, which was adopted in 1999,

NGOs and individuals can write directly to the CEDAW Committee in case of violations, provide country-specific information on States, and review State reports. Indeed, if a State report is deficient or false, NGOs can prepare a ‘shadow report’ expressing their critical views and present it orally and/or in writing at annual CEDAW Committee Expert meetings in Geneva or New York. These

CEDAW 30 YEARS ON



The UN General Assembly first adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979.

Photo: United Nations

sessions are open to NGOs and individuals. Thus by getting involved in their country reports, perhaps collaborating with other NGOs, Soroptimists can contribute to the effectiveness of the treaty.

Furthermore, Soroptimists can make a difference by working towards the achievement of universal ratification and implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocol, by encouraging regular reporting by State parties and by supporting increased follow up by the Committee. By promoting CEDAW, Soroptimists can show their tireless commitment towards the betterment of women’s lives around the globe. For the full text of CEDAW, please see: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm>.

Suba Parthiban
SI/E Programme Officer



Dear Soroptimists

In line with the Sustainable Leadership training at the Governors' Meeting in Amsterdam and in the spirit of Soroptimism, we suggest that you use the adjacent 'Leadership Commitment' document to remind your club members of the pledges they made when they took their oath to the Soroptimist International of Europe cause in helping women and children.

This 'contract' was developed in order to remind each and every Soroptimist of the devotion, commitment and perseverance necessary to reach our common goals. It will help guide and reinforce the message we all so deeply believe in and strive to communicate to the international community. It can also be used to reiterate why we became Soroptimists in the first place and why we should continue our work.

We sincerely hope that this document will be used in the spirit in which it was developed – with compassion and understanding.

In Soroptimist friendship

SI/E Board 2007-2009

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

1. We agree to disagree.
2. We agree to treat each other with dignity and respect, even when we disagree.
3. When we disagree, we agree to (1) explain why, and (2) provide other alternatives.
4. We agree not to get so tied to our own position that we ignore other points of view.
5. What is said here stays here, unless we agree that it should be told to others.
6. Misery is optional (and so is guilt).
7. We agree not to take ourselves too seriously and to laugh often.
8. We agree that we are all in a state of learning, and that we will be open to suggestions or questions from each other that are offered in the spirit of learning and support.
9. We agree not to shoot the messenger!
10. We agree to support the consensus of the group.
11. We agree to speak slowly and remind others to do so, remembering that English/French is not everyone's native language.

July 2009

LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT

Whereas, I _____ choose to belong to Soroptimist International and to assume a position of leadership;

Whereas, I recognise that while other leaders have different styles and skills than me, they share my dedication and loyalty;

Whereas, I acknowledge that leaders have a duty to fulfil their obligations to the membership; and

Whereas, I know that working together magnifies many times the contributions that I can make individually;

Therefore, I pledge to:

1. Uphold the ideals of Soroptimist;
2. Devote myself to the Soroptimist mission to improve the lives of women and children by setting an example for others to follow in creating positive public awareness, supporting fund raising goals and increasing membership;
3. Support other elected, appointed and staff leaders by praising a job well done, by offering alternative solutions to problems, giving credit where due to group efforts, supporting decisions made, and offering honest opinions when asked; and
4. Identify potential leaders and support my successors.

If unable to fulfil the duties of my position or this commitment, I agree to resign my position in order to allow someone else to have the opportunity for leadership that will help the organisation grow.

Signature _____





At the SI/E Water Congress, Fabien Cousteau, Maria Soumonni and Mariet Verhoef-Cohen with the representative from Norit toast the future of cooperation with water from the Amstel that had been treated by their water purifier.
Photo: Bea Rabe

Sponsoring Water Projects

THINK 'OUT OF THE BOX'!

If Soroptimists want to transform the lives of women and girls, we must invest an extra effort in supporting women and empowering them to help them secure a dignified future. We need to scrutinize our projects from the right angle and a fresh perspective. We need to work out how we, as Soroptimists, can make the best possible use of the resources and opportunities available in contemporary society.

We have to think boldly when dealing with our future projects. There are so many opportunities available for increasing the financial contributions and the number of projects. However, to exploit those opportunities in the best way, we have to work with the public, with big international corporations and with our governments. We should not try to re-invent the wheel, but make the most of the available opportunities, and thereby transform the lives of women and girls on

a larger scale. In short, we have to think 'out of the box'.

The women benefiting from our projects, in many cases Africans, must be equal business partners in all endeavours. They need to assume responsibility and take the initiative.

With our support and guidance, they can take these projects into their own hands and assume responsibility for their own economic and social development, education, good health, empowerment and respect.

The drinking water and sanitation products and the associated services have to be 'paid-for' products and services, if the project is to be sustainable. This commercial style of thinking and operation will generate revenue for the local female entrepreneurs and will ultimately also benefit the greater community.

We have published a theoretical case study on the SI/E website, which we encourage you to read. It gives a good impression of the kind of business model that we have created and elaborated. Our approach is based on a detailed action plan that was developed over the past two years. We are confident that you will recognise the potential of this approach. We hope this case study will start the ball rolling. If you have any questions, please let us know. By the time you read this article, we will be in Nairobi, Kenya, to implement the first 'Soroptimist Business to Water' project. Think big for the best results!

Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, SI/E Federation President

Koosje Wijland, Sponsor Manager

Norit's water purifying machine offers African villages great opportunities.

Photo: An Stalpers



Many clubs in the European Federation have been inspired by the theme of President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, 'Soroptimists go for Water'. By 1st April 2009, 225 projects had been initiated for a total of € 794,615, and these are only the projects that resulted in a Programme Focus Report. As of 26th August this figure had reached € 813,319.

The Selection Committee had a difficult task to short-list the eight best projects (see The Link No. 214) for the awards. A jury of experts selected the winner of the SI/E Water Best Practice Award based on very specific criteria, while the Public's Prize resulted from an on-line vote open to Soroptimists and non-Soroptimists alike who could read about the nominees on the website: www.soroptimistsgoforwater.nl.

The SI/E Water Congress in Amsterdam was the venue for the award ceremony. The winner of the Best Practice Award 2009 is Club Antananarivo Mandrosoa/Madagascar for their project 'Construction of a well, toilets and a crèche in Ambohidehilahy Antananarivo, Madagascar'. Harivela Rabetokotany, Fara Ratsimanohatra

and Mbolatiana Razakarisoa of the winning club received the award and a cheque for € 10,000.

Club Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine received the Public's Water Award, and a cheque for € 5,000 was presented to Olga Markova, Nataliya Nechukhayeva and Natasha Pysenko. This project aims to give children in an orphanage for handicapped children sustainable access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. This project will help improve the children's health significantly. The prize money for both Clubs will support their projects.

The poster presentations at the SI/E Water Congress showed the wide variety of water projects that Soroptimists have initiated or supported to improve the lives of women and children – and, in some cases, entire villages.



SI/E President Mariet and the participants in the SI/E Water Congress honoured all eight nominees before the winners were announced in Amsterdam.

SI/E Water Awards

HONOURING THE WINNERS



Soroptimists from all over Europe congratulated Olga Markova, Nataliya Nechukhayeva and Nataliya Pysenko from Club Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine on receiving the Public's Water Award. Photos: An Stalpers

TALKING ALL ABOUT WATER

Inspired by the theme 'Soroptimists go for water', SI Dortmund Hellweg, in partnership with the Club de Bilt in Bilthoven/NL, focused on creating a water project with an impact: 'Building a well in India for the benefit of girls' education.

Raising awareness

Assisted and sponsored by the local energy company 'DEW 21' (Dortmund Energy & Water) and the 'Emschergenossenschaft' (River Emscher Ltd.), Club Dortmund Hellweg organ-

ised an 'All about water' event to raise awareness of the impact of water in the community and throughout the world and to obtain money for a project to build a well in India. Seven Soroptimists from Club de Bilt joined us to spend the day together with several women from other service clubs in Dortmund.

We presented two guided tours: a visit to the waterworks at the river Ruhr and a tour of the local river Emscher, which was formerly called the 'sewer of the Ruhr region', but is no longer polluted thanks to a costly clean-up programme.

The afternoon programme included keynote speaker Rita Römert-Steinau, founder and president of 'Chance auf Leben e.V.' (Chance for Life). Eighty women listened to her talk about the importance of water wells in villages. In most developing countries, the burden of fetching water falls entirely on women and young girls. Providing a well closer to the village would allow women and girls to spend more time on their education. A centrally placed well enables the girls to go to school, get a job and become independent.

Using a widespread network

Rita Römert-Steinau has developed long-standing contacts and a widespread network of reliable partners in India. This allows her to initiate help wherever needed. There are no administration charges. She and her fellow members share the commitment for this charitable work. All expenses are borne privately.

The fundraising day 'All about water' made a net profit of € 3,050. In addition, the relief fund of the German Union donated another € 2,000. The money for "Chance auf Leben e.V." has been used for the construction and installation of a drinking water supply (a drilled well with pipeline) in Khanav Village near Panvel, south of Mumbai.

In February 2009, three sisters of our club visited the village and helped celebrate the completed well with the villagers.

For additional information please visit the websites: www.chanceaufleben.de or www.soroptimist-dortmund.de

Iris Ritter, President, Club Dortmund Hellweg

Women and girls are usually responsible for fetching water in rural areas of countries like India.



SAFE WATER FOR BORJ SOUGUI

The SI Club Tunis Fondateur adopted its 'Ksibi 2' project in line with their initiative 'Femme, Enfant et Eau (Woman, Child and Water)'. The project was realised in the village of Borj Sougui, 25 km from Tunis. Eight wells around the village, drilled by the Ministry and Provincial Government of Ben Arous, secure the water supply for 96 families, including 243 women and children, a school and a youth centre. Before that the women and girls had to walk quite a distance to obtain fresh-water from the river.

Water cooperative is formed

In order to come up with the finances, the participating families formed a 'water-cooperative'. A commission evaluated how much money each family can afford to pay. The ten poorest ones, who were unable to contribute at all, were supported by Club Tunis Fondateur, who also helped out about 30 families with an amount of about € 5000 from SI/E (UNESCO February 2008). The remaining € 6000 will be funded by Club d'Agen.

A study regarding wastewater and sewage has already been contracted. According to an agree-



Before the project was realised local women had to walk a great distance to fetch drinking water.



The Ksibi 2 project helped provide lavatory facilities to local schools.

ment, signed in Tunis, the remaining amount of about € 6,600, will be used for wastewater treatment.

Thirteen French Clubs donated some € 12.600 to the project: Foix and Agen, who headed the project, Alès, Avignon, Biarritz/Côte Basque, Cambrai, Le Puy-en-Velay, Le Quesnoy, Lille-Métropole, Nérac-en-Albret, Nice-Côte d'Azur, Paris-Fondateur et Toulouse. In addition, the Italian Club Chieti participated.

An emotional visit

In May 2009 a group of 12 Soroptimists travelled to Tunis. It was quite emotional when we arrived at the village. There was a wonderful evening reception with the candle ceremony, an exchange of flags and, of course, the presentation of the cheque and signing of the agreement. After this official part we all celebrated the 3rd anniversary of Club Tunis Fondateur.

Dominique Carpentier, Club d'Agen

'ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN'

Clockwise from left: Soroptimists and non-Soroptimists alike were proud participants of the 5th Peace Marathon in Rwanda, supported by SI/E.

Below left: The Soroptimist school at the San Marco Centre offers local children a chance for a better education.



The International Peace Marathon of SI/E took place in Rwanda this year in May for the 5th time. Here is German Soroptimist and incoming SI/E President elect Kathy Kaaf's personal account of the marathon and the accompanying activities in Rwanda:

I had already discovered the 12-year-old boy with the bright green plastic shoes in front of the stadium of Kigali. When I saw him again at the presentation of the 'Run for Fun-winners', I could not believe my eyes: he had run five kilometres in these totally inadequate shoes and made third place. These children are the hope for Africa!

A commitment to Rwanda

25 club sisters from Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Germany and San Marino took place in the Marathon, Half

Marathon, Run for Fun or simply as spectators. Former SI/E VP Bettina Scholl-Sabbatini originally had the idea for the 1st Marathon in Rwanda. She wanted to combine SI/E President 2003-2005 Heidrun Konrad's motto 'Women building Peace' with her commitment to Africa, and especially to Rwanda, which was deeply depressed after the genocide of 1994. After the success of the first marathon in 2005, it has now become an established event: 3,279 people participated this year: 95 % Africans, the rest Americans and Europeans. For 2010 President Paul Kagame will not only be asked to be the patron again, but also to be a participant in the Run for Fun. This would surely mean a full stadium in the one-million-city of Kigali, which is, incidentally, the cleanest city I have ever seen.

SI/E subsidised the Peace Marathon with € 10,000. The Federation had 2,500 T-shirts made

in Rwanda in bright yellow with the Soroptimist logo and the motto of the Marathon, 'Ending Violence against Women and Children'.

Importance of raising awareness

In the presence of guests from politics, culture, sports and other NGOs, SI/E President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen delivered a brilliant speech at the gala event, making the point of how important it is to raise people's awareness through such activities. Mariet also established contact with a representative of UNICEF, who informed her of the organisation's plans to equip all schools in Rwanda with toilets. This conversation has since been followed up.

Water and sanitation and, of course, education were the key words during our trip through the small, but with nine million inhabitants densely populated country. We visited most of the important projects of Rwanda's six clubs. As a highlight we celebrated the inauguration of San Marco training centre in Kigali with its multipurpose convention hall. The complex comprises a school, four buildings with dormitories for children and houses for widows and their children. All buildings are simply equipped, but well designed. Many clubs and unions have contributed to this successful San Marco project, including the Union of Luxemburg and Club San Marino, Belgium and a number of clubs from the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Iceland and Sweden. In September there will be an international workshop in design here at the initiative of Professor Gaddo Morpurgo of the University of Venice, Italy. Artists and academics will discuss 'Artisan Methods of Working with Vegetable Fibres'.

Kathy Kaaf, SI/E President elect 2009-11



Passing the finish line was a proud moment for everyone!

6th SI/E Golf Friendship Days

SOROPTIMISTS GO(LFING) FOR WATER



Participants in the SI/E Golf Friendship Days played at four different courses, including the beautifully located Golf Club Murhof.



The event generated €1,500 for the Rainwater Harvesting project of Club Gisenyi/Rwanda.

Five days of playing golf on top courses in beautiful surroundings, sunny weather, excellent food and wines, and all this with a cheerful group of friends in the spirit of Soroptimism: sounds too good to be true? Not when Monika Studer of Club Vaduz invites fellow Soroptimists to the 'Golf Friendship Days' in Southern Styria/Austria.

From 20th-25th April the golfers stayed on a farm situated in the mythical 'realm' of a nature park. Thanks to the 'Steiermark-Golf-Card' the group golfed on four courses, including one of the top courses in Europe.

The culinary part of the agenda included wine-tasting and delicious local cuisine at the romantic Ottersbach castle. At the Polz' vineyard we experienced a vinegar-tasting and tried a prizewinning pumpkin seed oil, the local speciality. Brigitta Kada, President of Club Leibnitz, and artist Angelika Fink offered tasty specialities in Angelika's kitchen studio. And let's not forget the wonderful dinners and lively conversations at the Studer's home.

Our eventful days generated a donation of € 1,500 in support of the Rainwater Harvesting project of Club Gisenyi/Rwanda. The donation was presented to Club President Languida Mukarurangwa during a celebration on 28th May 2009 in Gisenyi.

The 7th SI/E Golf Friendship Days will take place from 19th-25th April 2010, once again in Southern Styria. Golfing Soroptimists are heartily invited.

Juliette Geib,

Club Luxembourg-Clairefontaine

STRENGTHENING AFRICA FOR THE FUTURE



The visit to the Hamlin Fistula Hospital gave everyone the opportunity to see the enormous benefits of the support given by Soroptimists.

President elect Eliane Lagasse and SI/E Project Manager Africa Roswitha Ott attended the African Meeting East in Addis Ababa and also had the chance to visit some of the extremely worthwhile projects in Eastern Africa. The following is general summary based on the reports submitted by Roswitha and SIFAF interim President Asha Abdulrahman.

The Future African Federation Conference for Eastern Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia was opened on the 16th May 2009 by the Minister Firenesh Gezahegne, Ministry of Women Affairs in Ethiopia, Pamela Akello, Senior Asst. Director of Education and Ambassador Halima Mohamed, representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Minister's speech outlined the efforts of the Ethiopian Government to promote education and equal rights for women. Some 30 Soroptimists from Rwanda, Kenya and the host Club Addis Ababa were in attendance.

The Club Addis Ababa did an excellent job of organising the Meeting. Although the number of participants was smaller than hoped, all were eager to learn and understand about our organi-

sation. It was a welcome opportunity to share experience and talk about the possible Future African Federation. The warm welcome of Club President Debre Melaku and the hospitality of the whole Club made all the Soroptimists feel at home.

Helpful Training

President elect Eliane Lagasse conducted the training according to the SI/E Training Manual. Roswitha Ott then informed the meeting about 'Soroptimists go for Water' and all the worthwhile projects that have been realised. She also explained the Project Exchange Pool (PEP), which offers the possibility of collaborating on good projects with the Unions and Clubs in Europe, and the 'Women for Water' partnership. The discussions and the many questions following the training showed again how important this information is.

Participants left the African Meeting East with new strength and motivation. Plans were made to start new Clubs in the existing countries and new clubs in Goma and in Burundi. It was stressed how important it is for members to pay their dues and fund raise to make the SIFAF financially stable for future meetings and more extension work. Asha Abdulrahman, who is also President of the Union of Kenya, summed it up perfectly: 'I have never felt so happy to be a Soroptimist as I did



After the official meeting, everyone joined in celebrating Club Addis Ababa's 5th anniversary.



Firenesh Gezahegne, Roswitha Ott and Debre Melaku discuss Women's Affairs in Ethiopia at the Meeting.

during that meeting. We should all work hard to achieve the resolutions we made in Addis. Let's put all our efforts together in strengthening old and forming new clubs.'

Hamlin Fistula Hospital

An afternoon was devoted to visiting the Hamlin Fistula Hospital that cares for women with childbirth and related injuries. Maternal death and disabilities are the highest in Ethiopia due to

child marriage, overwork and malnutrition of girls. Women from all over Ethiopia come to the Hamlin Hospital and find care and treatment free of charge.

Eleven obstetrician-gynaecologists with 23 nurses and fifty former patients provide overall care to the women and girls. Approximately 1,200 operations are performed every year in Addis Ababa. Four outreach centres have also been opened to help fistula patients. Through these centres some 200,000 women with vesico/recto-vaginal fistula have received treatment. Those women who cannot be sufficiently cured to return home live in the village of Desta Mender, which means joy. Thanks to SI President Margaret Lobo's President's Appeal, Soroptimists from all over the world have generated funds to give substantial support to Desta Mender and to women who need a long-term support.

CZECH AND SLOVAK MEETING IN PRAGUE

The first International Meeting of Czech and Slovak clubs took place at Kromeriz, situated in Northern Moravia between both countries. It was organised as a workshop and brainstorming event and was the start of a happy tradition. Since then, the clubs have met every year at different venues, most recently in April 2009 for the 6th Meeting in Prague.

We started the weekend meeting on Friday night with a jazz concert at a tavern in the Old City of Prague. For Saturday morning the members of Club Prague had prepared a sightseeing tour that ended with the wedding party of club member Jana.

Afterwards we met to talk about projects and club life. Following the festive dinner in the evening, there was a so-called 'Auction of Scarves', which was a lot of fun and also generated a nice sum of money for our project. A sightseeing tour of the modern areas of Prague was arranged for those who could stay till Sunday.

These get-togethers mean a lot to members of the Czech and Slovak clubs and are an inspiration for all. They also help to develop and sustain the excellent relationship between the clubs.

Irena Coufalova, Secretary, Club Prague



Participants enjoyed a tour of the Old City of Prague in splendid sunshine on Saturday.

Support for Afghan Women

KUDOS TO THE DANISH UNION



In a personal letter to Hanne Jensbo, Ines Alberdi, Executive Director of UNIFEM, thanked the SI Union of Denmark for supporting their Election Project in Afghanistan with a donation of € 10,000.

The Afghan National and Provincial Council (PC) elections took place in August 2009. Everybody hopes that this process will stabilize the democracy in the country.

In order to increase women's participation in the Provincial Council, UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) initiated a project to encourage and to familiarise women candidates with the election proceedings. 'The role of women in this political process of getting sustainable democratisation is indisputable on a human rights platform, and it also brings added value from a development perspective,' says UNIFEM.

Women candidates face many problems unique to their gender, including cultural restrictions on printing their pictures on campaign materials and ballots (necessary in a largely illiterate population), limited access to funds and restricted mobility to campaign widely and freely. They are also targets of both verbal and physical threats. In the weeks prior to the elections, scores of women candidates have emphasized their need for both financial support and training.

Persistent and very real security issues, paired with loud complaints regarding the effectiveness of the role of PC members, led to concerns that few women would put themselves forward. However, despite all these challenges and threats, a record number of 324 women came forward to run, represent their constituents and work for a stronger Afghanistan.

This UNIFEM project focused on bringing together 72 PC women candidates from seven provinces, by offering a 5-day capacity building training in Balkh. Participants learned about the role of PC members, campaign and human rights, as well as the rights of candidates. The training also allowed the women to build relationships and share knowledge and information amongst each other. The generous donation from the Danish Union virtually funded the entire event.



As The Link went to print, the final and conclusive election results had not yet been published.

CELEBRATING WITH THE

Representatives from each Club came on stage to welcome the 1,400 Soroptimists attending the evening of celebration.

Photos: An Stalpers



The Union of Clubs in the Netherlands, Surinam and the Dutch Antilles is one of the oldest in Europe, and even one of the eldest in the world. And the Dutch are proud of it. They celebrated their 80th anniversary with a big party on the eve of the European Congress in July with speeches, music and a lot of kind words from several guests.

The audience of 1400 Soroptimists from the Netherlands and abroad was greeted by 100 women on the stage, each representing a Dutch Soroptimist club, a milestone in this anniversary year. Dutch Union President Akke Timmermans-Kuiken enthusiastically acted as Mistress of Ceremonies throughout the celebration. Among the speakers were SI President Margaret Lobo and SI/E President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, who is a former President of the Dutch Union herself.

DUTCH UNION



SI President Margaret Lobo congratulates the Union on its anniversary.



Members of the Union invited guests to a celebration drink after the event.



From left: Dutch Union President Akke Timmermans-Kuiken, former Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers and SI/E President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen applaud the performers.

Combattimento Consort Amsterdam delights the audience.

Dutch architect Kees Dam, whose late wife was a dedicated Soroptimist. The Combattimento Consort Amsterdam gave a brilliant performance of Handel's Water Music, a hint to the upcoming European Congress. During the concert photos were shown from the Dutch photographer Eddy Postuma de Boer, showing women and children from all over the world coping with the problems of their everyday lives.

Special guest of honour was the former Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers of the Netherlands, who is president of the UAF, the Foundation for Refugee Students, which the Dutch Union has helped to fund for four years.

And there was a lot of music. As a tribute to this anniversary, Kurdish composer Ali Authman, a former student of UAF, wrote a special composition. He was sponsored by the famous

A highlight for all the participants was the reception in the foyer of the Amsterdam Muziektheater, with a lot of friends from home and abroad meeting for the first time or again.

Helma Coolman, Club Utrechtse Heuvelrug

Social Care Centre in Kegums

HELPING THOSE IN NEED



Our Club Ogre-Kegums is quite young – it will be five in November this year, yet we already have many good friends. We are happy to have three Friendship Links with Club Pälkane (Finland), Club Kristiansand-Øst (Norway) and Club Cirencester (Great Britain).

Thanks to initiative of our Club members and donations given by Soroptimists from Club Cirencester, the inhabitants of Kegums' residential home for the elderly received two comfortable outdoor benches, two functional beds and a lovely flowerbed. Seventeen elderly people who have various health problems call this facility home. The new furnishings brought a lot of joy to their everyday routine along with feeling that they are not forgotten. In addition, they are being cared for not only by the staff but also by energetic and vibrant Soroptimists.

On 21st May 2009, Jo Newbould and Jackie Gloyn from Club Cirencester visited our Club and also the residential home to meet its inhabitants and the manager, Lilita Slomaka-Kaktina. It was Jo's second visit in Kegums, and she was delighted to see the improvements in the quality of life at the home compared to a year ago. A song sung by one of the women moved Jo and Jackie to tears.



Members from Club Ogre-Kegums unite in saying thank you.

This cooperation with our Friendship Links has been very successful and we plan to actively continue the project 'Support for Kegums families in need.'

Club Ogre-Kegums, Latvia



Soroptimists from six countries gathered for a weekend of fun and new friendships.

Chiemgau

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP MEETING

The Clubs of Prien am Chiemsee and Traunstein hosted a very successful 'International Friendship Meeting' in the Chiemgau, the south eastern part of Bavaria in Germany from 22nd to 24th May 2009. 135 sorores representing 32 clubs from Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy and Turkey took part in this special event. They were offered an interesting cultural programme with sightseeing tours, e.g. to the two islands of Lake Chiemsee: the 'Herreninsel', where the famous Bavarian King Ludwig II built one of his marvellous palaces, and the 'Fraueninsel' with its ancient convent. The guests could choose to participate in the well-organized excursions to the medieval chapel of Urschalling or to the 'Etten dorfer Kircherl', a small church on a hill near Traunstein, for a concert on the oldest Bavarian baroque organ. A special highlight was the evening party in Umrathshausen with a banquet and a fashion show, organized by two Soroptimists, with fashion wear from their own companies and presented by members of the hosting clubs – great fun for everybody! The weekend gave everyone the opportunity to make new friends and to invite participants to events in the visitors' own countries.



Club Gdansk

OUR RIVERS AND US

When members of Club Gdansk asked themselves the question, 'Could water be our future?', they already knew the answer. It is becoming more and more important to remind young people of the importance of water, create awareness of the surrounding waterways and teach children how to keep them clean and safe.

This is how the idea of the Internet competition 'Our Rivers and Us' came about. In cooperation with the local and regional water authorities, Club Gdansk prepared fifteen questions, which were published on the Polish SI webpage. Within fourteen days we received more than two hundred replies from schools all over the Pomeranian region.

On 4th July 2009, the twenty young authors who had submitted the best answers were invited to a cruise to Krynica Morska. The following forty will participate in a workshop 'The Mouth of the Vistula River', which will be held in September.

We are very happy that the Marshall of the region supported our competition. In addition, the 'Regional Environmental Protection Fund' in Gdansk sponsored the Vistula River cruise.



Ela Latocha, Club Gdansk



The successful young authors from the competition were honoured at a special event before enjoying a cruise on the Vistula River.





Creative fundraising

GARDEN TOUR IN SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

Have you ever been daunted by the question of how to celebrate your club's 10th anniversary? The President of Club Aalen/Ostwürttemberg, Andrea Hoffmann, and her Vice President Marietta Hageny came up with an original idea: they invited Soroptimists from the German Union to join them in a six-day tour of the most beautiful gardens in South East England. 26 Soroptimists from Munich to Aachen took up the offer to experience an unforgettable trip with visits to **Sissinghurst, Scotney Castle, Kew Gardens, Great Dixter and Chartwell** – top English gardens for all botanical fans.

But that was not all! The hostesses organised sumptuous picnics and stops at authentic English country manors, small castles, a church with a Chagall window and Brighton. And of course, a pub visit was also on the programme! The German Soroptimists spent evenings exchanging ideas about projects and even had the chance to meet British sorores from Sevenoaks. One of the highlights of the journey was a picnic lunch at the East Sussex farm of Chris-

tine Cromwell-Ahrens, member of Club Göttingen, SI/E Representative to the Council of Europe and newly appointed Editor of *The Link*.

The organisers donated the profits of € 6,000 to a children's home in Aalen and the international kindergarten in Tatabánya, Hungary.

The event was such a success that Andrea and Marietta decided to organise another Garden Tour from 6th-11th June 2010. For more information see info@kochschule-aalen.de.

Brigitte Gefßler, Club Aalen/Ostwürttemberg



After a sumptuous picnic lunch the group gathered for a souvenir photo with the view from Lundsford Farm in East Sussex.



Club Brussels Doyen created their own scarecrow for the competition.

Club Brussels Doyen
**SERVICE CLUBS
 COLLABORATE**



On the 2nd of May 2009, a sunny Saturday in Brussels, the Club of Brussels Doyen rose to the challenge of creating a superb scarecrow, coming 13th in a Scarecrow Competition, open to 50 voluntary organisations, which took place in the capital's main square. This event, co-ordinated by the Brussels Lions Club to raise funds for local charities, invited the collaboration of other voluntary organisations in Brussels (Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis etc.) alongside aid agencies working with people in the areas of mental health, special needs and in prisons.

Club Doyen was able to make the most of this opportunity to gain publicity for Soroptimist International in general and more specifically to draw the attention of the numerous spectators and tourists to the Soroptimist International Club of Belgium's project: 'Stop Fistula'.

Our congratulations go to Bruna Sassi, President of the Club of Brussels Doyen, and also to all the other Soroptimists who took part in this event. They raised € 350 for the 'Stop Fistula' fund and promoted the cause of Soroptimism with a smile!

Club Forchheim-Kaiserpfalz

BEAUTIFUL SOUNDS

It was the perfect ending to a warm and sunny weekend. Club Forchheim-Kaiserpfalz, a picturesque city in Bavaria, had invited to their yearly concert in support of the local music school and talented students.

The event took place on 17th May 2009 in the beautiful church of St. Johannis, whose pastor is also one of our sorores. Under the direction of Anke Rosbigale, teachers and students performed works of the baroque and renaissance era, as well as contemporary pieces. The audience was numerous and delighted by the 'little ones', but equally enjoyed the participating teens who performed with surprising virtuosity.

At the end, Vice-President Ursula Ertl presented a red rose to each of the performers and handed over a cheque of € 1,500 to the Director of the 'Musikschule Forchheim'. The money will be used to buy new instruments. For more information about the Club, please visit our new website: www.clubforchheimkaiserpfalz.soroptimist.de



Ursula Ertl presented the Director of the Music School with a cheque and gave each performer a red rose.



The audience was especially enthralled by the performance of the young musicians.



SOROPTIMISTS INTERNATIONAL EUROPE

10th October 2009

Salzburg Nova (Austria)

Charter to be presented by
Governor, Union of The
Netherlands

Tonny Filedt Kok-Weimar
Club President

Constanze Sperka-Gottlieb
Zillertalstrasse 41°
AT - 5020 Salzburg
Phone: + 43 662 433 143
E-mail: c.sperka@gmx.at

10th October 2009

Sudurland (Iceland)

Charter to be presented by
Governor, Union of Norway
Karin Guttormsen

Club President

Thorny Bjork Jakobsdottir
Eyrargata 30
IS - 820 Eyrarbakki
Phone: +354 863 4490
E-mail: thojak@centrum.is

31st October 2009

Enschede Dunya (The Netherlands)

Charter to be presented by
Governor, Union of Turkey
Necibe Gucum

Club President

Berty Blom
Lasondersingel 186
NL - 7514 BX Enschede
Phone: +31 612 501 432
E-mail: bf.blom@planet.nl

NEW S/I/E CLUBS
TO BE
CHARTERED

8th March

International Women's Day

22nd March

World Water Day

5th June

World Environment Day

21st September

International Day of Peace

25th November

International Day for the
Elimination of Violence
against Women

10th December

Human Rights Day
(celebrated by Soroptimists
worldwide)

13th October 2009

25th Anniversary

Club Milano alla Scala (Italy)

23rd May 2010

6th International Peace Marathon

Club Kigali (Rwanda)

3rd - 4th July 2010

S/I/E Governors' Meeting Ghent (Belgium)

FORTHCOMING
EVENTS FOR S/I/E

INTERNATIONAL
AWARENESS DAYS

✓ Please submit your texts for the
next issue of The Link to S/I/E
HQ by 15th November 2009!