



Step it Up for Gender Equality'

**Soroptimists Celebrate International Women's Day**

**Geneva, 8 March 2016** – The Unions and Clubs of Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) are taking the occasion of International Women's Day 2016 to raise awareness of women's issues and celebrate the a variety of ways the organisation is working to improve the lives of women and girls.

France is participating in an interactive session on 'Who are the industriElles?', which is the culmination of a yearlong drive to encourage women to pursue careers in technology. At the conclusion of the event the French Union will present three 'Women & Technology' prizes. This activity is in line with the biennium theme '**Soroptimists Invest in Education**' with particular focus on women and girls choosing career paths in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics).

Responding to an initiative of the Ministry of Universities and Research and the Ministry for Equal Opportunities, several clubs of SI Italy are participating in special events in high schools over a three-week period to encourage girl students to study STEM subjects. These include talks by inspirational speakers, suggestions for curricula, lectures on scientific and technological subjects and giving girls hands-on experience. As agreed with the Ministry of EO, Soroptimists will also address the issue of equal opportunities at these events.

SI Denmark is taking this opportunity to raise awareness of its work to stop trafficking. Among other things, they have financed a health clinic for victims, offered vocational training before the women return to their respective countries and funded the medical treatment and education of young victims who have gone back to Lithuania.

42 Clubs of SI Belgium will organise public screenings of the film, *Suffragettes*, to mark IWD. Clubs of SI Austria are planning a wide range of public events from self-defence training and film viewings to talks on subjects such as women in business, equal opportunities for women and single parenting. The challenges facing society in connection with the recent numbers of asylum seekers is the topic of a further event.

Among other things, the Clubs of SI Madagascar will support women prisoners with children and organise a conference with women magistrates to inform women from slums about their legal rights



in cases of domestic violence. SI Rwanda will organise marches in the areas where SI Clubs are located as part of the national celebration with the theme, 'Step It Up for Gender Equality, Strive for Women Empowerment'. They will also organise a radio broadcast and support local child mothers by funding their health insurance.

SI Club Port au Prince is sponsoring a talk by specialist spotlighting the problems faced by women who became disabled after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The winner of a prize draw will receive a prosthesis. As in previous years, Soroptimists will also donate personal hygiene products and toiletries to the women inmates of an urban correctional facility. SI Clubs in the Ivory Coast are participating in a national conference on the challenges and issues in connection with the empowerment of women.

SI Madrid has invited the public to a talk on the plight of Syrian refugees, whereby the proceeds will go to a children's organisation. SI Club Varna is collaborating with other women's organisations to hold a conference on Women for Development, which will discuss importance of taking a proactive position on social issues. SI Ptuj is organising its eleventh concert on IWD, featuring well-known musicians who support the Club's projects. Proceeds from ticket sales and donations are given to causes aimed at improving the position of women and helping socially vulnerable families. SI Bucharest is collaborating with another NGO for an event at which Soroptimist objectives and projects will be presented to the public. Some of the beneficiaries of the project will also attend.

Soroptimist International of Europe is a service organisation of women in management and professions with 34,000 members in more than 1250 clubs in 62 countries. It is the largest of four Federations of Soroptimist International, which was founded in Oakland, California in 1921. Today, there are more than 75,000 members worldwide in some 3000 clubs in 123 countries. Derived from Latin *soror* (sister) *optima* (best), which is interpreted as 'the best for women', Soroptimist International sees itself as a global voice for women.

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