



A message from SIE President Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis on International Women's Day

Soroptimists Join UN Campaign to Achieve Gender Equality

Geneva, 8 March 2016 – In a video address on the Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) website – www.soroptimisteurope.org – President Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis pledges the support of 34,000 Soroptimist for the United Nations and UN Women campaign, 'Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it Up for Gender Equality', the theme for International Women's Day 2016. 'The Unions and Clubs of Soroptimist International of Europe have long worked nationally and at community level towards gender equality, and thus we welcome this drive,' says SIE President de Franciscis. Many of the some 4500 projects for a total of €12 million focus on concrete ways to educate, empower and enable women. Thousands of women have already benefitted from these initiatives, which provide training, grants for further education, income-generating skills, legal advice, healthcare support and even shelter from violence. As SIE President de Franciscis notes, 'For Soroptimists, every day is International Women's Day!'

The Italian professor of law has chosen 'Soroptimists Invest in Education' as the theme for her presidency. Soroptimist initiatives demonstrate how education can break down inequalities, combat prejudice and enable women and girls to realise their dreams. In her video message, SIE President de Franciscis renewed her call for more women and girls to pursue higher education in the STEM disciplines, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. 'We will do our part to support those who choose this career path by favouring candidates in STEM areas for the scholarships of Soroptimist International of Europe in 2016-2017', says de Franciscis.

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.