

Facing the future together  
A Power Point with 23 pictures

**78<sup>th</sup> Federation Conference 25 – 27 October 2012 Waterfront Hall,**

**Belfast, Northern Ireland**

Thank you very much, dear President Maureen, for having invited me to your conference.

You know how much I was impressed by your excellent organisation of last year's conference in Brighton and how much I appreciated the quality of its contents.

I have not only praised the federation of GBI to the skies, but also requested members of my federation to come here with me. So my predecessor Eliane Lagasse and my first Vice-President Christine Peer are with me to bring you the warmest greetings of the Federation of Europe and its 35 000 members.

Last year I gave you an overview of the importance of our international projects through a power point show. This year I have taken my inspiration from your theme "**Facing the future together**". To know something about this future, I first had a look at what the future interests and trends of women and girls are to be able to draw conclusions on how we Soroptimist International should proceed to firstly attract women for our movement and secondly educate those for whom we care to become the leaders, the decision makers of the future.

The most important definitely is:

**Women want freedom**

Women no longer accept being deprived of natural rights which men have always enjoyed.



Although she risks her life by doing so, Manal al Sharif defends her right to drive a car in Saudi Arabia. Society's awareness is much higher now and women's hopes for a future to live in a community where men and women are treated equally have taken on new life.

SIE is working on a club in Dubai where a lot of excellently educated women work who would like to share their experience and friendship in a movement like Soroptimist International.

What many of us have not been aware of is that this year women in North Korea were for the first time allowed to ride a bike in a city.



## **Women want education.**

“I want access to the world of knowledge”, MalalaJusufzai demanded.

This brave 14-year-old Pakistani girl was shot for having dared to go to school.

*This young heroine not only fought for her own right to learn, but campaigned for girls' education in general, opposing and defying the ignorance of the Taliban. She even had the nerve to openly criticise them in a video documenting her life.*



Malala understood very well the necessity of exercising power to have an impact on the world. She altered her ambition for the future from becoming a doctor to aspiring to be a politician.

“To be able to change something you have to go into politics”, she argued in the video which has become a testimony of her life.

2

## **Women want access to all jobs and equal pay**

Women no longer have to let themselves be deprived of professions which were characterised by “this is nothing for a girl”.



The introduction of Girls' Days has helped to give them broader perspectives as to the choice of their jobs and income.

More women in top jobs have served as role models. Many women claim to have got into executive positions with the help of a quota system.

Anyway: Economic independence is the key to a self-determined life and protects women from suffering the problems of a small pension and poverty in old age.

Nonetheless there are new problems arising e.g. with women in the army.

In this context I urge you to read the feature on military women in SIA's latest

magazine “Best for women”.



Women have become champions in different sports which used to be open only to men.

The potential role women's football plays for women's emancipation all over the world cannot be valued highly enough, especially in countries like Iran, Iraq, North Korea, China, Laos, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon.



### **Women want children and jobs**

Women particularly in higher ranking jobs often renounced having children. Some countries, such as mine - Germany – have not been well organised in enabling young mothers to have their babies and children well looked after and thus be able to keep on working.



It will be of socio-political impact for us women all over the world to guarantee that mothers who want to continue their work **and** career have the accompanying possibilities to get good care for their children.

3

### **Women want to share responsibilities with their partners**

Nowadays a lot of female students find the time of their studies

Appropriate for having babies. But like all mothers they need the understanding, assistance and sharing of responsibilities with their partners.



It seems that more and more young men - at least in the industrialised world –understand the wealth and richness active fatherhood can bring them. Therefore we have to ensure that young mothers **and** fathers receive the necessary support from the community and their professional world to enjoy a good work-life-balance.

### **Women want company, networks**

Women nowadays are multitasking global players. They greatly value a professional network which helps them make connections and create opportunities in their working lives. These professional networks are a real competition to our movement as well as the other womens'



and women's service organisations particularly the newer ones like Lady Lions and Lady Rotarians.

That is why we have to work hard to attract young women and make them realise our unique profile:

- with our mixture of different professions –
- which make the discussions in our clubs so rewarding –
- with our internationality – which is a guarantee of openness, vitality and requiring tolerance –
- with the range of all ages – which gives us the opportunity to learn from role models within our own clubs –
- with the flexibility and cosmopolitanism of our members which is evident through Soroptimist meetings in every corner of the world –
- the examples of perfect behaviour in times of illness – which helps in overcoming similar situations of sickness
- with the friendship which is the crown of all relationships, a friendship which lasts until death
- with the range of our programmes and projects reaching from Haiti to Papua New Guinea, from Rwanda to Iceland
- with our involvement and voice with the United Nations and the Council of Europe (to only name these two) which let us leave our mark on the search for solutions for the most urgent problems of our global world: violence against women, environmental disasters, land grabbing, water and food security.

4

### **Women want access to clean water, healthy food and land**

Water is the basis of life and women are the most involved in obtaining it.

Soroptimist International of Europe has been successfully committed to the water and sanitation theme since 2007.



Women need to have the right to own land as men have always had.

Our Soroptimist Friends in Africa have campaigned to obtain these rights and make sure that they are asserted in everyday life.



In highly industrialised countries an enormous variety of food is at our disposal on the shelves of supermarkets.



With this over-supply, a lot of superfluous food is bought and more and more food lands in the trash can.



Women consumers are at the core to stop wasting food, to stop wasting resources and change the families' view on food.



Urban gardening becomes more and more popular in the cities. In this context Michelle Obama's initiative to plant a kitchen garden on the grounds of the White House is of exemplary importance.



Children in industrialised countries as well as in developing ones cannot be taught soon enough through Kita and school gardens like this one in Kigali Rwanda how crops grow and what a pleasure it is to eat healthily.

Facing the hunger in the world, facing rising food prices, facing in addition the speculation in food commodities, facing the devastating influence of wasting resources in our environment, we have to change our view of food.

A higher regard for food is essential.

The motto of my biennium and the daring motto of the European Congress in Berlin 2013 is:

**Visions of Paradise - Soroptimists Go for Water and Food.**

cordially invite all of you to come to Berlin next year.



I have three appeals which all of us can and should practise around the world:  
Buy more consciously, eat less meat and stop wasting food.

**In addition to these maxims for everyday-life,**

Women are realizing more and more that if they want to change the world, they have to be consistent and take responsibility in politics.

We have had the thrilling testimony of Naomi Long.

**And Women want political influence**

They realize that if they want to be among the decision-makers, they have to take risks and commit themselves

6



- at all levels: in public life,
- in their children's schools,
- in regional politics,
- at the national level.

**If they want peace in areas where conflicts have been dominating,** they have to demand to sit at the conference tables when conflicts are being discussed.

And there is no better city to prove how successful this can be than BELFAST.

**But: No influence without knowledge about Hardcore Subjects**

Women have to deal with topics which they do not like to hear about,  
and some of which they are even afraid of knowing about:

The arms industry, trafficking, corruption.

Let us not close our eyes to a new form of stealing people's rights by grabbing their land as it is largely practised in Africa.



There is no excuse nowadays to not be informed. I dare to say that we Soroptimists should be the best informed women of the world.

Awareness, advocacy and action is our threefold approach to dealing with problems.

**So let me conclude by reaching** out to you and motivate you to have the hard data at your fingertips, be able to cite facts and figures and thus show that we know exactly what we would like to be changed.

Let us truly be “a global voice for women” and their rights.

Thank you very much for your attention!

Kathy Kaaf