

International President Mariet, Distinguished Guests, Soroptimists in Conference, Friends.

Wow! How fast can a year fly by – it only seems like yesterday that I was stood on the stage in Malta.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank members of the Federation Management Board, staff, and all other post holders as well as you for your commitment to improving the lives of women and girls over the past year.

I would like to say a special thank you to members of my own Club Soroptimist International Cwmbran for their support particularly Nerys Lines and Anne O'Donoghue who have been my rocks over the last 12 months making sure that I was where I needed to be at the right time, and simply checking that I was Ok.

The friendship, encouragement and support that I have received has been greatly appreciated, thank you.

Tonight, is an opportunity for all of us to celebrate our Soroptimist membership, and our belonging to an international organisation with goals to improve the lives of women and girls.

Together we have achieved a lot. It has been a successful year for us because of your programme action work and your commitment

to growing our organisation. We should **ALL** be proud of what we have accomplished. Thank you for **stepping up and leading the way** to help women and girls across the world to reach their fullest potential. Thank you for **stepping up and leading the way** to secure the future of Soroptimist International Great Britain & Ireland.

All year I have used a quote from the Global Peace Foundation, and I would like to read it now as I believe it expresses why we are Soroptimists and what we want women and girls to think, feel and ultimately become.

“Girls with dreams become women with vision. Confident women who participate in their communities and countries. Strong women who contribute to their nations’ growth and prosperity. Compassionate women who, as mothers or guardians or leaders, nurture and guide the next generation—boys as well as girls—towards greater equality, justice and prosperity.”

Yet, we are all aware that twice as many girls as boys will never start school, and that girls are still the first to be denied the right to education. Equally, we understand that if we are to achieve gender equality by 2030 there is still much work to be completed.

In the October 1939 issue of the British Soroptimist magazine, the editor said, “that as a band of women whose aim is the furthering of international understanding we must stick together and keep in active working order our Soroptimist organisation; the value of which is greater than ever before”

This was true then and is equally true today as we live in turbulent times on a global scale. The fundamental objectives of the organisation are still current today and, regardless of progress, it may always be necessary, in some way, to fight to attain and preserve our rights as women.

So, we must continue to educate, enable and empower women and girls through our project work so that they can achieve their fullest potential and play a role locally, nationally or internationally. And most importantly, we must advocate for this change at all levels of society.

I hope that over the last three days, we have stimulated you to return to your Clubs, Regions, National Associations and Networks to continue your project work to help women and girls.

We have heard inspiring sessions about the White Ribbon campaign and the need to include men in the work to end violence against women and ultimately achieve gender equality. We have been praised for our work on ending modern day slavery and

encouraged to do more to end this heinous crime. We have heard about the international project work of Plan International which many of us support, and celebrated our own good projects.

Your project work is what makes us unique as an Organisation because our network of Clubs deliver a diverse range of projects which enables us to work on and influence international policy setting and awareness raising through our Consultative Status with the [UN Economic and Social Council \(ECOSOC\)](#).

But we should remember that being a Soroptimist is also like being in a very large family. We get to meet women from across the world and learn about their lives and challenges whilst working together and enjoying friendship and having fun. Just like this week!

I have met with Soroptimists across the Federation and from other Federations. I have been humbled by your friendship and hospitality and am grateful for your willingness to serve our mission to transform the lives of women and girls.

Finally, I want to finish with a short story.

Nine years ago, Mark Zuckerberg invited 5 people to his Harvard room to discuss a business opportunity.

Only 2 people showed up.

Today those two people are billionaires through the launch of a new and innovative concept.... Facebook.

NOTHING IS MORE EXPENSIVE THAN A CLOSED MIND, AND A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

We are not a business, but if we are to play our part in achieving the sustainable development goals, and in particular no 5 gender equality, then we must continue to take action NOW.

We must be resilient and work to ensure the continued success of Soroptimist International Great Britain & Ireland by growing our Federation and making a difference through our work locally, nationally and internationally and in our status at the United Nations.

With this success, we can help more women and girls achieve their fullest potential and ensure women have an equal place in every facet of life and play an active part in shaping the world that we want to see.

I look forward to continuing to work with you.

Thank you.