**General Meeting 2013 – OPENING ADDRESS – PAT BLACK**

**ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE YEAR**

It is with great pleasure that I present to you a summary of some of the achievements of SIGBI during this year. I have chosen a few highlights but there is so much more which has happened during the year.

**SIGBI ANNUAL REPORT**

You have already received copies of the SIGBI Annual Report with details from each Director and their relevant Committees of Federation Councillors on what have been the main achievements for this year. As you can see they have been working very hard on your behalf.

The Programme Team have given an overview of your Programme activities.

And you have a summary of the work of the Benevolent Fund, the Diamond Education Fund, and the Emergency Relief Fund.

You have had a copy of the SIGBI Accounts and the auditor will be here to present the audited accounts.

**SIGBI PROGRAMME BOOKLET**

In addition this year the Programme team have produced a separate report summarising examples of Programme work from you, the members and clubs, and showing the sums of money you have raised as well as the numbers of women and girls supported. Your Programme Action Chair has a copy and more copies will be available for you to use as a recruitment tool.

**PROGRAMME ACTION CHALLENGES**

During this year you have all been outstanding in your efforts to turn our Soroptimist Vision into Action, focussing on education, empowering and enabling women and girls to change their lives for the better. I challenged you last year to include yourselves in this and I have been amazed and delighted at the many ways in which as individuals you have taken up this challenge.

You have listened, investigated, researched and learnt, informing yourselves about a huge range of topics and issues. Some of you have taken on personal challenges and realised ambitions, increased your skills for leisure activities, whilst others have become computer literate or extended their knowledge and use of social media. It has been so exciting listening to your stories and I am sorry I can't name every one of you here today, but you can certainly applaud yourselves for all of those achievements. Added together they make a huge increase in the empowerment of the women of SIGBI. Now you have started – keep going!

**INVOLVING EVERYONE FOR THE FUTURE**

I hope you have been able to follow my travels on my monthly blog on the SIGBI website as well as in our superb colourful magazine, Soroptimist News. Thank you to Sally Higgins and to Jane Slatter for all their hard work on making the SIGBI website a great source of information and a really interesting place to visit. Thank you Sheila Manchester for making Soroptimist News so welcome on our doorsteps.

I am not the only member of the Federation team who has been travelling however. Every member of the Board has been able to visit Regions, countries and clubs this year, some of this at their own expense, and Federation Councillors have been visiting clubs or speaking at conferences. I know this has been hugely valued by club members especially those who cannot travel to a SIGBI Conference.

**BUILDING THE FUTURE OF SIGBI**

Many of these visits have been for the presentation of the ‘Building the Future of SIGBI’ proposals. A lot of questions about the organisation have been raised with us, not all of which we have been able to answer at the time. These have all been brought back to the Federation Management Board and answers found. You will find a Q & A section on the SIGBI website after Conference of the most frequently asked questions which we hope will be of help in the future.

Clubs have taken up the ideas and proposals which have fitted their own position. Members have made huge efforts in enthusing other women and so we have seen many new members this year. We need to continue to engage women in our activities so that our combined efforts really can make a difference.

**SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL**

We are very proud that this year Ann Garvie, a member of our own Federation has taken on the role of the International President. She is leading Soroptimist International at a time of much needed change, the SI Board having decided this year to adopt a new modernised constitution and to proceed with the incorporation of SI. You have welcomed and heard from International President Ann this morning.

The consideration of charitable status for SI will also continue but it is necessary to take things forward a step at a time. SI is looking at a number of other areas which will take us forward as the leading women's service organisation in the 21st century. We are delighted to welcome here to Conference the new Global Executive Director of SI, Deborah Thomas, and wish them

both every success as they lead SI forward.

**UN/ECOSOC**

One of the proudest moments for us this year has to be the achievement of special consultative status with ECOSOC at the United Nations. With this privileged global position also comes strong responsibilities which every member will need to play a part in. Federation Director Sue Biggs and her team will be providing guidelines for all of us on what actions we will need to take but I urge every club to ensure that they contribute so that we can continue to be a player on the international NGO stage. Make contact with your local politicians and community leaders, with members of Governments, and if you have a branch of UN Women in your area, then get involved. THANK YOU.

**FMB**

There will be changes on your Federation Management Board for next year and I am sure you would like me to thank those who are leaving the Board for all their years of hard work.

Maureen Maguire and Jane Slatter have come to the end of their term of office and we thank them for all their hard work on behalf of SIGBI.

I must pay tribute to the staff in HQ who work ceaselessly and very patiently on behalf of SIGBI. I can’t believe there is another organisation that is served better than we are.

Congratulations and thank you to every single member who has contributed to making SIGBI the amazing Federation which it is and for showing the world what Soroptimists can achieve for women and girls.

Thank you for ensuring our Soroptimist Vision has become our Action.

I am sure that SIGBI as an organisation will continue to go from strength to strength with your new Board and under the leadership of Margaret Oldroyd.