

## **Final Address**

International President Ann, Honoured Guests and Soroptimist Friends

In Gateshead last year, I challenged us all to live up to the standard set by our founder President and her members. We set out to make sure that our eightieth year was one in which we lived the theme of this conference as 'women who lead change together' both in relation to our programme work and to the Federation. This conference has shown that we have done just that.

During the last couple of days we have marvelled at the outstanding project work being done in our 29 countries and we have celebrated the culmination of SIGBI's BIG Project and all that this means for the women of The Gambia. Our Annual Report shows that great progress has been made in organisational development, in raising our profile through our work with governments, ECOSOC and the UN, and in enhanced use of the social media. Our Office Staff and the Federation Management Board have been a true team working tirelessly throughout the year on our Building the Future of SIGBI priorities and we have made great strides towards achieving them. To those leaving, those continuing and those joining the Board – I wish you every success and thank you for your service to SIGBI.

One of the many pleasures of being Federation President is the opportunity to witness the organisation at work at first hand. And here I would like to thank all the many members who have looked after me, given me lifts and welcomed me into their homes – thank you so much. At countless, meetings, conferences and study days, I have heard members describe the difference which they are making in their own and the international communities.

In particular, in Zimbabwe, I had the enormous privilege of actually seeing wonderful projects in action in the lives of women and children. I will never forget that experience.

Projects seen throughout the year convince me of the rightness of our focus on Education and Leadership. I think of being in South Africa on Human Rights Day last March – 20 years since democracy and the election of Nelson Mandela.

It was he who said :

‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Education is the great engine of personal development and it is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of a mine, that the child of farm workers can become the President of a great nation.’

What better encouragement could we have?

In my opening address, I spoke about anticipating this conference for a long time. The first planning meeting here was three years ago and many people have contributed to making it happen, especially our wonderful stewards.

There is a great African Proverb : ‘If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together’. That describes the Harrogate conference team :

Anne Spence, Jane Davies, Tricia Coll, Pat Shore, Helen Davies Jane Richardson, and Liz Batten together with Claire Bell and Val Jenkins our Deputy Chief Stewards. Please will you all stand so we can thank you.

Now I am very conscious at this point that I must avoid the 'Oscars speech syndrome' and not start thanking absolutely everyone I can think of!

Some of those who have supported me are not in this room but have done so by tolerating my frequent absences from meetings and tasks unrelated to Soroptimism. One supporter, who is very closely related to me, has threatened divorce if I even mention his name – but I am allowed to say that he is secretly very proud that Sheila put one of his photos on the front cover of an issue of the magazine this year!

My club friends gave me a magnet at the start of the year which says :  
'Friends are like walls. Sometimes you need to lean on them, and sometimes you just need to know they are there.' You have been a fantastic wall!

I will remember two things above all from this wonderful experience :  
the faces of women around the world, all dedicated to our cause, and -  
the voices of children sitting under a tree singing of their joy at being at school.  
The faces of friends and the voices of children are the best gift in a year of gifts and I thank you for it. Being President does take time and hard work but what you get in return is immeasurably greater.

Thank you all for educating, empowering and enabling me and I wish incoming President Jenny equal joy and great success.