



St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
T: 0300 244 4000

Ms Tricia Coll
SIGBI Federation Office
2nd Floor
Beckwith House
Stockport
SK4 1AF

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Dear Tricia

I am delighted to offer my support for the Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland's 84th annual conference.

The theme of this year's conference, Empower Today, Enable Tomorrow, is hugely important and I welcome your commitment to growing your organisation and working to improve the lives of women and girls.

The Scottish Government is committed to gender equality and is leading by example working to empower the next generation of women.

The National Advisory Council on Women and Girls was established in Scotland last year to provide advice, support and challenge to me and my team with the objective of realising the shared goal of equality for women and girls in every community across Scotland. They have recently launched the #GenerationEqual campaign, to support a future where gender inequality is a historical curiosity.

Last year I launched the 'First Mentor' initiative with a commitment to mentor a young woman for a year. Through this initiative I had the pleasure of mentoring Charlotte Liddell, a young mum of two from Fife. Seeing her grow in confidence and discover her potential has been a truly enriching experience, while she gave me a new perspective on the many issues affecting young people today. The First Mentor initiative is running again this year and I am looking forward to mentoring another young woman.

On International Women's Day this year I called for other women in leadership roles to join me by pledging to give some of their time to help a woman or girl achieve her goals. By giving our time and sharing our experiences, we can support a new generation of women to reach their potential, and learn from them in return. If we are serious about reducing gender

inequality and creating the next generation of women leaders, it's up to us to ensure this happens.

I would like to thank Soroptimist for their continued work locally, nationally and internationally to improve the lives of women and girls. I congratulate you on what I am sure will be a successful conference and my best wishes for the year ahead.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Sturgeon', written in a cursive style.

NICOLA STURGEON