**Good morning/afternoon and hello everyone – Regional President Helen thank you for your invitation to join you at your Regional event. I bring greetings from Soroptimist International.**

**When your Regional Secretary Rita asked me if I could attend the Regional meeting, my first question was date and time, and when she added that it would be virtual, I was delighted because otherwise I could not have been with you to-day.**

**I am staying with Ann and Peter Dawson in Stafford, as last night, I celebrated 75 years of service and achievement with the members of SI Sutton Coldfield. This had been booked for several years, so I knew that I could not let them down. Researching for that event, I discovered that the first International President from SIGBI was a member of SI Sutton Coldfield - Dr Violet Parks – 1956-1960 – she made 10 December an International Day for Soroptimists.-**

**It was interesting to read of her work especially with refugees after the Second World War and how she was trying to close the camps. Thinking of that to-day, there are probably more camps across Europe than there were in the 1950’s.**

**Regional President Helen’s theme for this year has been “Celebrate the past, Create the Future” which is just what we did last weekend at the SI 100th Anniversary Celebrations.**

**Soroptimist International is an organisation made up of women actively engaged in their communities, who are in touch with the local challenges for women, their conditions and their rights, as well as having a global vision of the world and of women’s issues.**

**100 years is a long time and there have been many changes since SI was established. When the pioneer members chartered that first club in Oakland, California, they could hardly have imagined that they were laying the foundations for an organisation that would to-day be established in over 120 countries throughout the world.**

**Thinking back over the past 20 months, in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, Soroptimists stepped up in the face of the obstacles that it brought and still brings.**

**Despite being in lockdown, having limited funds and more challenging circumstances, Soroptimists throughout the world implemented many life changing projects. These have been real and very tangible, each one of them embodies our purpose of advocating globally and acting locally.**

**The resulting impact was enormous and is mainly due to Soroptimists local knowledge of what their communities need and having the networks to make it happen.**

**The will to survive is one of the most deeply rooted of all human instincts and we are human enough to hope that the organisation will still be flourishing in another 100 years. We need to think of the challenges that our organisation will face in a rapidly changing world. I have been thinking about this quite a bit and here are the questions that I have being asking myself and now I pose to you -**

* **Will an organisation like Soroptimist International be a necessity for women living in 100 years hence?**
* **What will women expect of Soroptimism?**
* **Will our way of service still be valid?**
* **What kind of identity will we have?**
* **Is it time to consider changes?**

**Although it is impossible to know exactly what the future holds, I personally, believe that Soroptimist International will continue to be an important link for women in the future. Our fundamental objective will always be current and necessary because history repeats itself and human nature cannot be easily changed.**

**Gender equality, human rights, peace and security are fundamental to ensuring that women take their rightful place in society, we must encourage women and girls to seek opportunities, to build networks, act as role models and fulfil their aspirations.**

**My big wish for 2022-2023 is to bring people and Federations together by encouraging our global membership to work together. I want us to show the world that 70,000 + women are standing up together for human rights, working to stop violence against women, to end poverty and all of the causes that we support and work to improve.**

**Covid has certainly shown us how to do that – using digital technology such as zoom would have been shunned by many prior to 2020, but it has opened up the world. We can now connect with members right across the globe at the stroke of a button, albeit, some are in darkness of night whilst others may be enjoying daylight. Being at SI means a 24 hour clock! You are doing that just now through meeting on zoom with your Friendship links**

**I have asked the 5 Federation Programme Directors that on four of the United Nations International days, Soroptimists across the world do something together to mark these days.**

**It could be orange the world – during the 16 International Days of Action**

**It could be buy a pencil on International Education Day,**

**It could be give a book to children who do not have a book to write on or even own a book on International Literacy Day.**

**I remember back in 2012, I was turned to tears when chartering the club in Kathmandu in Nepal. I asked why a seven year old was tearing out some pages of the book that I had just given her. I was told that she wanted to give these pages back to another girl who had given her some pages when she did not have any. Can you imagine? Would that happen in this country?**

**So my main aim is to engage members across the world, to remember and be proud that they are one organisation working together - think of the impact if 70,000 women are wearing orange on the same day or every club arranges for a building to be lit up in orange, or give a pencil/book or pen on the same day, these are 70,000 ways to educate, empower and enable.**

**I want to encourage the growth of our membership, and make sure that our mission, vision and values are appealing to the future leaders, regardless of their backgrounds. New and innovative clubs are being born, and they are thriving, during the past six months I have attended many chartering of new Clubs – two clubs recently in our own Federation in India, and 2 new E Club in Milan, both of whose members are all under the age of 35 year and a further E Club in France.**

**These new clubs share several exciting features - they have developed cause based partnerships; they involve young people; and, while they all adhere to the values and principles of Soroptimist International they don’t necessarily follow the normal club activities, instead they may communicate via WhatsApp, hold breakfast discussions and work individually and separately from one another.**

**What is important, that we ensure that all members – new and continuing, feel welcome and valued for what they bring to the club? Every member of a club should feel that she belongs and able to contribute. Should she be in difficulty, then the best people to help her are her Soroptimist friends. Let us show compassion, integrity, dignity and respect to all.**

**There are some other things that I want to achieve – increasing our global voice at the UN and in Member States, advocating for changes in legislation.**

**This year a new structure for Advocacy was introduced at SI. Getting to grips with the operational aspects has been time consuming. Our current Director of Advocacy, Bev Bucur, a dedicated and enthusiastic volunteer has been spending up to 15 hours a day working, so the Advocacy aspect of SI has been divided into four distinct committee - Global Impact, Global Policy, Global Voice and Global Development and Partnership. These committees need to bed in and may need fine tuning.**

* **Global impact covers the impact of the work that Soroptimists carry out at club, national and international level. Each Federation Programme Director is a member of that committee and she reports on this work being carried out by Clubs. Remember to fill in that Focus Report Form.**
* **Global policy committee reviews what and how our representatives at the UN seeks to influence the policies that are made by Member States.**
* **Global Voice Committee develops our communication networks to show the world who we are and what we do.**
* **Global Development and Partnership Committee works to develop and build partnerships with like-minded organisations.**

**Over the last 15 months, I was responsible for the establishment of the Soroptimist International Foundation which is to be the home for SI Appeals. This has taken time and energy, but I believe that we will have a more targeted and focused approach to projects. The Foundation has charitable status and this will enable us to apply for grants etc.**

**In 2022, the SI Board will consider and agree what the actual focus/theme will be – but I suspect that it will be education as it would have immense power and fundamental role as a driver for sustainable development, peace and equality.**

**Investing in girls’ education brings high rewards, breaking cycles of poverty and aiding economic growth. Education empowers women and girls to make informed decision affecting their future wellbeing, health participation and quality of life.**

**At present, the SI President’s Appeal is the only vehicle through which SI carries out an actual project. The appeal for 2021-2023 – “Opening Doors to A Bright Future” was launched officially on 1 October and will run for 2 years. It will cover at least one project in each Federation focusing on** [Sustainable Development](https://www.globalpartnership.org/multimedia/infographic/education-and-global-goals) **Goal 4 – Education.**

**Imagine how long it would take to count all the way to one hundred and thirty-two million? Each and every one of these numbers is a girl, who, today, is not able to go to school and received the education that is her basic human right. Instead she may need to watch younger siblings, fetch water far away from her home, or help to sell items at the market or on the street. Because of this, the odds of girls being able to pull themselves and their future families out of poverty are stacked against them.**

**With millions more girls now at risk of never returning to school, this work has never been more important. As we move forward, educating women and girls is the best investment that we can make to alleviate poverty and create a safer and more secure world. It has an incredible multiplier effect, providing returns for generations.**

**Let me show you my President’s Appeal presentation.**

**SCRIPT FOR THE POWERPOINT – SLOTS IN HERE.**

**Soroptimists, our work is not finished, but I do know that together, you and I are looking forward to an exciting and challenging future, spreading our service and friendship around the world to change the world for the better through education, improving the quality of life for women and girls who suffer many hardships and barriers.**

**There are great opportunities right now, and I hope that you will seize them by looking outwards, by thinking outside the box, by changing experiences, by building back better, by thinking like the Soroptimists who have gone before you, that your vision for humanity will make a lasting impact on our world.**

**So again thank you for inviting me and giving me this opportunity.**