

Information requested

General information

Soroptimist International is a worldwide association of Service Clubs for professional women. It comprises 4 Federations. One of them is Soroptimist International of Europe with more than 1100 clubs in 66 countries in Europe, Africa and the Caribbean.

Soroptimists implement projects to promote

- A culture of peace
- Education and training of women and girls
- The maintenance of cultural heritage
- The protection of women and children against violence
- Health
- International understanding through exchange programmes

Soroptimist International as NGO is accredited to UNESCO in Paris.

The President of Soroptimist International of Europe 2003-2005 is Ms. **Heidrun Konrad**, A-9800 Spittal, Ebnerwiese No. 12.

Her theme for her term of office is “**Women Building Peace**”.

I. Actions accomplished by the organization

1- Activities launched

A **Peace Charter** has been created and signed by personalities in politics, science, economy, arts etc. A list of signatories is published on www.soroptimisteurope.org

In nearly all clubs “**Peace Projects**” have been realised during this period. (Please find a selection at the end of this paper)

“**Peace Dolls**” have been created as messengers for peace. See www.peacedolls.nl

The first “**Soroptimist Peace Marathon**” in Rwanda will take place the 15th of May 2005 in Kigali, Rwanda.

A “**Peace Congress**” will take place in Vienna from 8-10 July 2005. Prominent speakers will highlight peace-keeping and peace-building activities of women throughout the world.

A “**Soroptimist Peace Award**” will be honour a women for outstanding merits in conflict resolution.

- The *objective* of all these activities is the promotion of a culture of peace through single projects.
- *Beneficiaries* are thousands of people, especially women and children, traumatised by wars and conflicts.
- *Locations* of activities are more than 60 countries.
- Our *resources* are the endeavour and the ingenuity of our 33.000 members.
- The *results* are more awareness of conflict situations, their origin and their solution in daily life as well as in a greater context

2-Key difficulties

To raise awareness and to promote acceptance of conflict resolution in daily life.

3-Eight areas of action

All 8 areas are almost equally important. Most important seem:

- Promoting respect for all human rights: Human rights are not only violated in big conflicts, but also in daily life. This starts in the family, in schools, in the community
- Promoting sustainable economic and social development: Inequality and poverty are the most frequent reasons for conflicts.
- Ensuring equality between women and men: Gender inequality also is a reason for conflicts.
- Advancing of understanding, tolerance and solidarity.

II. General Progress Towards a Culture of Peace

4-Progress

Maybe that the progress is not measurable, but within the communities where the projects have been realised a better understanding, more tolerance and solidarity has been achieved.

5-Obstacles

Especially for the youth the influence of the media is negative. Very seldom we find positive examples, in the headlines we find war, violence, murder. We would need more positive role models. The media should observe their responsibility.

6-Measuring the progress

No ways could be developed.

III. Partnerships and Cooperation

7-Partnership

A wide range of project partners have been found, as schools, communities, other NGOs. It always depends on the single project.

8-UNESCO website

In our different publications we have always referred to the UNESCO website and the different events, conferences and propositions for action published there.

IV. Commitment towards new Initiatives

9-new projects

A lot of new projects are planned. So far about 60 projects have already been realised or are on their way. We will continue with the activities indicated under I.

10-priorities

We will follow the priorities under I-3.

11-future approaches

We will enforce our endeavour and develop still more projects to promote a culture of peace.

Selected projects:

Soroptimist International Club Bamberg-Kunigunde, Germany

For some time Club Bamberg-Kunigunde has been supporting performances in Bamberg's private "Chapeaux Claque" theatre which designs plays specially for school children. These plays deal with problems such as violence in schools, xenophobia and the sexual harassment of children. The practical realization in the classrooms has proved highly successful. These plays are acted out in front of the class by 2 – 3 actors with active contributions from the children. In this way young people see these themes a part of a reality in which they are actively involved.

These short plays have been successfully performed in schools with the support of the education authority. This, of course, costs money. The Club has financially supported a number of performances in various schools and for children of varying ages. We consider the goal at which this theatre aims extremely important and helpful; we decided therefore, to continue supporting its work and wanted, at the same time, to include our own Soroptimist objectives.

We have set out one point in particular from the Program Focus International Understanding: "The furthering of mutual respect between all cultures and the abolition of all forms of discrimination". In this way more tolerance will be achieved.

Chapeaux Claque has developed a new play based on these principles, "The Lord of the Five Rings". The play deals with the five world religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. The first performance took place in the small auditorium of Chapeaux Claque. The audience was very mixed, consisting of children, numerous club sisters and representatives of the press. The evening culminated in the signing of a Peace Charter.

This new play will now be performed for children aged 8 – 12 in the schools themselves. We are attempting to finance a number of these performances. Our goal is that the "Lord of the Five Rings", based on Soroptimist objectives and the Federation Project Women Building Peace" will enable young people

Soroptimist International Clubs GÖZTEPE, ALSANCAK, İZMİR, KORDON, KARSIYAKA GALLIPLI (CANAKKALE) PEACE PROJECT (Turkey)

The five Soroptimist Clubs of Izmir (Göztepe, Alsancak, İzmir, Karşıyaka and Kordon) have started the **Gallipoli (Canakkale) Peace Project** within the framework of SI/E "Women Building Peace" and also under the International Cultural Heritage project of UNESCO created to determine local candidate places.

The project started in April 2004 with a conference held in Izmir. The title of the conference was "Battle of Gallipoli" and was delivered by Prof. Dr. Ahmet Mete Tunçoku, the founder president of "Canakkale 18 Mart University" and present head of the "Atatürk and Battle of Gallipoli Research Centre of Canakkale 18 Mart University".

The Soroptimists of Izmir clubs and their friends joined a trip to Gallipoli Peninsula held on April 16th-17th, 2004.

The area, including all the martyrdoms of different nations was visited and a ceremony was held at the Monument for Turkish martyrs. A wreath was presented and a moment of silence was respected in memory of all the soldiers who had lost their lives there. After the speeches, the "Peace Charter" was signed and white balloons with origami white pigeons tied to their strings were left to fly in the sky by the Soroptimists as a symbol of peace.

A "Peace Tour" to Izmir and Gallipoli Peninsula is planned between April 20th-27th, 2005 as part of a continuing project. 5 Soroptimists from Australia and 5 from New Zealand are invited. 4 Soroptimists from Australia and 4 from New Zealand have applied and will be our guests. They will be hosted at Soroptimists homes in Izmir and activities will include :

*A city tour of Izmir

*Visits to Ephesus and Pergamon historical sites

*A tour to Gallipoli Peninsula

*ANZAC Dawn ceremony and other commemoration day activities

*A panel discussion on the topic of "Peace", presented in co-ordination with the "Canakkale 18 Mart University".

The United Nations has enriched the notion of heritage with this project called simply "Determining Local Peace Symbols" and has announced that not only historical monuments, but also historical sites or towns, cultural landscapes, natural sacred sites, underwater cultural heritage, museums, cinematographic heritage, documentary heritage, oral traditions, languages, festive events, beliefs, music and song, and literature, etc should be included. Many tangible and intangible cultural heritages could therefore be proposed as a "Heritage for a Culture of Peace".

The aim of the project is to carry the Gallipoli (Canakkale) Peninsula, well-known for its war legends, to the agenda of the world as a symbol of peace. In this respect, organizing an International "Peace Tour" to the sight, hosting Australian and New Zealand Soroptimists, is an endeavor to accomplish this target and attain mutual understanding between cultures.

The theme of the congress of SI/E that will be held in Vienna from 8th-10th July, 2005 is "Women Building Peace". The timing of the theme is perfect as we are in need of peace now more than ever.

The prospect of taking place in the peace catalogue of the United Nations through determining the symbols of peace of our country and also the activities of SI/E and Soroptimist Peace Prize of 2005, have motivated the five clubs of Izmir to work on this topic.

Soroptimist Club of Bucharest, Romania

The Soroptimist Club of Bucharest was founded 1995. From the very beginning, it aimed at helping the disadvantaged people in Bucharest. This disadvantaged population, whose poverty increases daily, bears the entire financial burden of a country developing towards a functioning market-economy. Consequently access to education decreases, despite efforts towards improvement undertaken by the Romanian Government.

Our modest social projects, realized through whatever funds we managed to raise, have succeeded in returning hope to some extremely poor families. We have taken over certain administrative costs acquired by a number of families due to be evicted because of the debts accumulated. The club initiated a training course for young women seeking employment, founded an art-therapy class for children with minor mental disabilities, equipped two schools in poor neighborhoods in Bucharest with furniture.

We tried to rescue and socially integrate a number of homeless children, etc.

I should like to address this last project in more detail. The existence in Bucharest of a large number of homeless children coming from very poor problem families with alcoholic parents, is no secret. In daily increasing numbers, they reject this way of life in favor of the streets. These children are condemned to vagrancy and are undoubtedly the victims of drugs and prostitution.

We, therefore, decided to join the efforts of various other Bucharest NGOs, (e.g. Save the Children Organization, Parada, etc.), which strive to rescue some of these children. Following the recommendation of Save The Children Organization, we assumed responsibility for two homeless children "families". This means two child couples, themselves the parents of 12 to 14 month old baby girls who are condemned right from birth to live in the city's sewage system, believing this way of life to be normal.

First of all, the "families" had the opportunity of talking to two club members (a psychologist and a legal expert). Apartments were rented for them, they were offered clothes, powdered milk and diapers, and a monthly food allowance. In the second phase they were found a place to work.

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Unfortunately, shortly after we started to take care of them, one of the "families" disappeared from Bucharest. Homeless children have no identification papers, so the "family" remains untraceable.

The other couple, Florin and Felicia, proved to be responsive to our efforts as well as willing to change their social status, thus our support for the three children continued. After two years of assistance, the "family" let us know that they were able to support themselves : they moved to a smaller town, where life was cheaper than in Bucharest. At the same time, they asked us to take over other homeless children that were more in need of our assistance. We consider their social reintegration a success. At present we are taking care of the Lepadu orphans, which we support economically, educationally and morally. We intend to continue this project by supporting young girls or "families", also homeless, as soon as we have the necessary financial resources at our disposal

We have to underline the fact that this success would not have been possible without the support of the SI Club of Essen, Germany (Dr.Christiana Haude) and of some wonderful people such as Anne-Marie and Caspar Reinhart from Switzerland.

Soroptimist Club Eisenstadt , Austria : Peace Project " All in the Same Boat "

For the 35 years jubilee Club Eisenstadt decided to design a project underpinning the Federation theme 2003 – 2005 "Women Building Peace" . They are planning an educational project aiming to train children aged 8 – 10 towards a better understanding of different religions. Together with schools, the club has worked out the following plan:

- a.) First children learn as much as possible about the principles and rituals of their own and other religions.
- b.) Guided by their religion teachers the children illustrate one of the major rituals of their own religion.
- c.) Rainbow scarves are painted.
- d.) A play is performed, based on the biblical narrative of Noah's Ark "All in the Same Boat " . Finally they all sing their "Rainbow Song" (a peace song)

The presentation of this project on April 14th 2005 is under the patronage of Hans Nissel , Governor , and Ma. Franz Steindl , deputy Governor of Burgenland .

Club Eisenstadt is not only providing the project design, but it is also financing the participating children's food and travel expenses and any material needed.

All the participating religious groups will be rewarded not only with Montessori Peace Games, but also with materials for their religion classes. All paid for by Club Eisenstadt .

The profits from this final presentation will be used to support the furnishing of classrooms in a SOS Kinderdorf in Sri Lanka.

Soroptimist International Club Rehovot, Rishon Le Zion and Givatayim

The Ethiopian women were invited to participate in different activities beginning in January 2002. Every week the women between the ages for 30 to 55 come to the club. The soroptimist members of the clubs of Rehovot, Rishon Le Zion and Givatayim come to the club.

At the beginning we participated in club activities which were thought to be suitable for new immigrants. But very soon we understood that we had to find a different way to reach and form relations with our partners.

We believe now that the most important issue is learning Hebrew and if possible reading and writing. So in order to reach this stage we have begun once a week to invite the women to participate in activities that make it possible for us to speak directly to them and not through a translator.

We have developed a few activities; physical exercises that can be done and through them you can learn the words for different parts of your body, learning about the origin of the names of the women - both the Ethiopian and of the Soroptimists, working together in clay and describing the meaning of the objects created. Celebrating the different Jewish festivals to both learn about them and the symbols of these holidays. During Hannuka - the lighting of the candles, during the Festival of trees the symbols - trees, the fruits of all the fruit trees in Israel and then learning songs in Hebrew. In this instance we had help of writing the Hebrew words in Maharit (the Ethiopian language) so that the women could sing along more easily. Making art work together and so on.

It is a slow process but we believe that with our volunteers we can form new relations that will bring

the women closer to mainstream society, will make it possible for them to help their children in their school work and in the future to finding suitable jobs.

There are about 12 Soroptimists who volunteer their time. When the activity is interesting more than 20 women participate. We hope that when we can reach a closer relationships we will understand better what activities are the most suitable.

The director of the club and the translator have worked along side us during this time and the budget for this was paid for by the money received from the Action Fund

Until the first of January 2003 we paid out the following sums:

Director: 4,953 CHF Translator: 2,477 CHF

We will have 4,570 CHF for the next year. We will use this only for the director and the translator will be paid for by the Rehovt Municipality.

Soroptimist International Club München-Schwabing & its involvement with Refugio - Centre for Counseling and Treatment for Refugees

“IfF - Refugio Munich“ - is the name of *Munich's Centre for Counselling and Treatment of exiled Refugees and Victims of Torture* (founded in 1994). It offers and provides social and psychological counselling, crisis intervention therapy, medical diagnosing and counselling for refugees who have been tortured and are either traumatised or in a psychological crisis.

Most refugees are referred to Refugio from social services, psychiatric institutions, courts or relevant authorities for refugees. As Refugio is the only counselling centre of this kind in the whole of Bavaria (Bavaria has about 12.2 Million inhabitants - Portugal: 9.8 Mio; Sweden: 8.8 Mio), refugees are referred to Refugio from all over Bavaria.

One specialty of Refugio is its method of working with patients in non-verbal-areas such as the Refugio art therapy programme (art groups and art workshops) for more than 200 children and young adults - and its music therapy.

S.I. Club München-Schwabing has been involved in supporting the Refugio Centre Munich for the past three years. By the end of 2004, the club had collected € 7.000 which Refugio will continue to spend on the treatment of two groups of traumatised girls. At the Club's 2004 Christmas celebration, we were on the receiving end: The Refugio Gospel Choir came over to our President's home and venue of the celebration to rock the house with their powerful and great voices. “We help you and you help us” were the words of the American choirmaster. The members of the choir were from China, Germany, Indonesia, Italy (piano), Kosovo, Senegal, and South-Africa. We had a truly international evening and an idea of how a planet of many nations could peacefully celebrate together.

Soroptimist InternatioalClub Villach , Austria BRIDGES TO PEACE 2004 – 2006

The international project focusses on **KURDISTAN/IRAQ** . In cooperation with a local organisation and partly based on personal contacts, we want to support women's efforts to rebuild a tortured country. Their work of bringing up children and managing domestic life are vital to the rebuilding.

The project:

We aim to raise sufficient money to support at least one **women- led mobile team** and to enable the group to purchase whatever is necessary. We have choosen to support a Kerkuk based team, because here Kurdish, Arabic, Turkmen and Assyrian women are working together to improve their hometowns. They have contacts with local women shelters and centres called Nawa, Khanzad or Asuda, provide first aid and health consultations. A female doctor offers mobile check ups. Female social workers deal with family problems and work with traumatised women and children. They provide very poor families with food and clothes. They take a stand against family violence and provide shelter.