

# Soroptimists Uniting to combat trafficking of women and girls



## **Special points of interest:**

- Soroptimist Campaign to Stop Trafficking of Women & Girls
- Children of Peace
- Exodus of Moldavian Women
- Best Practice grass root projects

# Combating Trafficking of Women & Girls

Trafficking of persons became a key issue for Sorooptimist International members in 1999 at the **XVIth International Convention** held in Helsinki, Finland. Members were deeply affected by the Human Rights and Status of Women panel discussion on trafficking of human beings, especially women and girls. The video of a young woman from Russia who had been caught in this web and sold into prostitution left an indelible impression on the hearts of everyone in the audience.

During the previous four years Sorooptimist had partnered with the Population and Development Association, PDA in Thailand and supported the hugely successful and sustainable **Sorooptimist International AIDS Mediation, SIAM**, project. This project had developed and tested the effectiveness of HIV preventive strategies and alternatives to the sex industry. Over 1 million dollars had provided for vital occupational training, income generation and education for more than 1300 girls and young women. It had substantially reduced the number of girls entering the Commercial Sex Industry with all of its attendant problems.

And so it was natural progression that Sorooptimist would want to be involved in the prevention of trafficking. The International President chose as her 10<sup>th</sup> December Appeal in 1999, '**Sorooptimists Stop Traffic**' and over £150,000 was raised. The money was distributed between **UNIFEM** and **MIRAMED**.

Our contribution to **UNIFEM** provided funds to create an anti-trafficking centre in the heart of the 'red light' district in Mumbai, India to include training, NGO networking and data collection and analysis. In short it provided a place for trafficked women and girls to obtain legal, health, social assistance and access to economic

alternatives to prostitution.

The **MIRAMED** Institute focused on prevention of trafficking through education and media campaigns throughout the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. Sorooptimist funds provided programmes to develop life/job skills for high risk girls.

Indeed, through **Sorooptimist sponsorship** the **MIRAMED** Institute arranged the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Sexual Trafficking Prevention Conference in Moscow in October/November 2000.

Representatives from 46 NGO's from 35 Regions of the Russian Federation and 6 former Republics attended. They included workers from crisis centres and education and researchers. Training took precedence in the first week with lectures and workshops in week two.

Delegates heard of the magnitude, the problems, the miseries, the misconceptions and the consequences of trafficking. Work is required on all levels to stop trafficking, from grass roots education and help for victims to the formation of national legislation and international co-operation and agreement. Officials, politicians, lobbyists and NGO's all have a part to play if this modern day scourge of slavery is to be stopped.

Action plans devised for the future included:

- Practical handbooks and manuals for front line workers
- Setting up hotlines
- Funding for victims
- Database collection, setting up web sites
- Distribution of education materials
- Lobbying

Sorooptimist International was delighted to sponsor the Conference and has

continued to offer material help, knowledge and expertise to put an end to trafficking.

Our members understand that the problem of trafficking is big business, powerful and dangerous. It is not just Asian or Russian, it is a global tragedy. It is happening in our countries, our cities and our towns.

Since 1999 club members in the **United Kingdom** have raised their own and others' awareness, have advocated for legislative change and taken action to combat trafficking.

**They have clearly understood that if we are to make a world fit for children that the root causes of poverty and lack of education must be tackled. Awareness raising, advocacy and action to eliminate poverty and to provide educational opportunities for women and girls are at the cornerstone of our programmes of service.**

In **Northern Ireland, Dungannon** members lobbied their Member of Parliament to support an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons condemning trafficking. In an attempt to discover accurate figures of women and girls being trafficked the **Lisburn** club invited a member of the Police to talk to them. **Kingston upon Hull** members lobbied their Member of Parliament to find out what steps the government was taking to deal with issues of trafficking.

**Medway, UK** members organised a cluster meeting with other Sorooptimist clubs and invited a police women in charge of prostitution to attend. She was interested in setting up a special Migrant Help Line with Immigration and Asylum teams. She made it clear to members that without the trafficked victims' co-operation prosecution of traffickers would not be effective. Nevertheless, members placed a newspaper article on International Women's Day

*(Continued on page 3)*



(Continued from page 2)

to highlight trafficking and are arranging a special Study Day involving the police, agencies and other women's organisations.

At the **Keighley, UK** club's Study day their Member of Parliament spoke of her concerns on trafficking and members supported her by writing to the Home Office. The government's response was to confirm its commitment to helping victims of trafficking and that legislation had increased the penalty for trafficking offences. This pattern of lobbying has been repeated throughout the UK. Support has also been given to the ECPAT organisation with members displaying badges on International Women's Day saying, **STOP TRAFFICKING**.

In the United Kingdom the trafficking of people for prostitution has only recently become a crime with the passing of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act of 2002. **The law makes no specific mention of child trafficking.**

One of the ways our members will contribute to the elimination of trafficking is by joining UNICEF's campaign to **End Child Exploitation**.

UNICEF seeks to strengthen the elements of the protective environment for the child through both prevention and rehabilitation.

- **Prevention:** Education and schools are the first line of defence in protecting children
- **Rehabilitation:** Drop in centres that provide counselling and shelter to victims.

**Soroptimists** throughout the UK are working with UNICEF to end child exploitation by increasing public awareness of the issues and raising funds for practical programmes.

In **Brazil** Soroptimists raised awareness about the real dangers of trafficking in their country by producing a pam-



phlet defining trafficking, its effects on Brazil and what can be done to stop it. In addition to distributing the pamphlet, clubs also held lectures and rallies, worked with the press and held educational projects. **SI Curitiba's** awareness campaign used billboards and flyers and has worked to educate the police about the need to punish traffickers and protect victims. The club designed an advertisement that appeared on 11 billboards with a telephone number to report incidents of trafficking anonymously. They also handed out 10,000 flyers in high schools warning girls about the dangers of trafficking. Their project gained media attention, further spreading awareness.

A similar venture was undertaken in **Japan** by **SI Oita-Midori** members who, surveying their community, found little understanding about trafficking and prostitution and that prostitution by girls is rapidly increasing. The club created flyers to communicate that buying girls is illegal and warning girls about the dangers. The flyers were handed out at schools, public institutions and in the street.

In **Japan's Minami Region**, the clubs of **Kasuga** and **Fukuoka-Minami** were awarded a grant to assist their project in raising awareness and providing services to women and girls who were trafficking victims. Besides producing and distributing multi-language leaflets for trafficking victims to make them aware of their rights and the services available to them, the clubs are also holding international symposia and assisting with the management of a shelter for victims of human trafficking.

Working on the premise that prevention is the best course of action **SI Seattle Metropolitan, USA** club teamed up with the Seattle Children's Home to aid its efforts to establish, maintain, and grow its outreach programme known as Street Links. This project focuses on homeless teens, - girls at risk. A night time van patrols the streets of Seattle providing food, clothing, and simple medical treatments but mainly building trust and to help them to connect with social agencies to help them get off the streets.

The club of **SI Chicago, USA** has hosted a number of talks in local high schools to inform girls about the techniques used by predators. The club has also partnered with a local organisation working with girls in the sex trade to distribute information to guidance counselors, educators and health care professionals who work in the targeted areas of Chicago where prostitution is common among young girls and women. Members also provided funding for a poster aimed at girls to advertise the Young Women's Empowerment Project as a confidential place where they could go to talk and get help.

As a consequence **SI Chicago** was invited to participate in a trafficking conference: **Demand Dynamics – The Forces of Demand in Global Sex Trafficking**. The club partnered with Captive Daughters and the International Human Rights Law Institute at DePaul University in Chicago to host the opening, participated in the sessions and subsequent formation of the 'Plan for Action'. Seventy five experts met in Chicago for two days with the purpose of developing a useable model and plan of action for government agencies and NGO groups. The club also plans to participate in the March

(Continued on page 4)

# Combating Trafficking of Women & Girls

(Continued from page 3)

2005 conference: **Pornography: Driving the International Demand for Sex Trafficking.** Meantime members continue to work locally and support the Genesis House which serves as a shelter and rehabilitation programme for women who have been in prostitution.

Members of **SI Newport Harbour** have



provided financial support to **'Captive Daughters'** a Los Angeles non-profit organisation that serves victims of trafficking in Southern California. The club has specifically donated to a trafficking project at the Mexican /California border and for an educational conference with the theme, **'The Perpetrator'**. The conference concentrated on issues surrounding those who target trafficking victims and is thought to be the first international conference of its kind. The Newport harbour club has also applied to set up a Soroptimist Friendship Link with SI Sarajevo with the specific goal of assisting with a shelter project that serves girl victims of trafficking. A recent delegation of Soroptimist members who visited Bosnia as a Study Group has also made donations to the Sarajevo project.

**'Catch Them Young'** is the title of the project run by **SI Onitsha, Nigeria**. It assists and supports young people who are sleeping on the streets. Often they are dirty and unhealthy. Some become servants or hawkers, others are subject to physical and sexual abuse. Recently the Federal Government of Nigeria passed a bill to stop women/child trafficking and child

labour and the Soroptimist National Association of Nigeria joined the advocacy group for campaign in support of the Bill.

Members of the **Morecambe and Heysham, UK** Club who belong to the anti-slavery campaign are committed through their individual action to talk to other NGO's about slavery and trafficking.

**SI Dyffyn, Wales** members asked their Member of Parliament to investigate the plight of trafficked victims who would face further abuse if they were returned to their country of origin. The Minister of State at the Home Office's response was that the UK Government was committed to ensuring that stronger measures are in place to penalise traffickers.

In the **Cameroon**, children have been kidnapped, sold to foreign buyers, killed and dismembered for ritual purposes. **SI Bamenda** members gained the necessary authorisation to visit seven schools, nursery and primary to sensitise the students on child trafficking. In the days leading up to Women's Day they made visits to the schools which have over 8000 children and 150 staff on roll. This awareness raising programme was most welcomed.

Soroptimists in **Germany** have worked long and hard on the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation and indeed on any form of sexual violence against children. In one Region members sponsor a Theatre group that has developed a programme entitled, **'My body belongs to me'** which aims to show children how to protect themselves against all forms of sexual abuse.

The club of **SI Coburg, also in Germany**, work with another group that has created a puppet show showing sexual abuse in a cat family by sponsoring the construction of a portable stage, puppets and performances in schools.

In **Greece** Soroptimist members were aware that their country is a destination for trafficked women. As a re-

sponse the Greek clubs printed thousands of brochures and distributed them in public offices, at doctor's surgeries and all places where immigrant women meet. The leaflets, printed in six different languages, offered information on public and private services in the host country, on financial and social help, on human rights and health issues as well as opportunities to learn the Greek language.

In the **Caribbean SI Anguilla** gave their views on Caribbean States Family Law strongly urging for a Juvenile Centre and a Family Court, - none currently exist. **Antigua** members investigated the situation in their country concerning exploitative child labour.

**Barbados's 'Stepping Stone'** multi purpose centre is able to offer safe harbour to young girls picked up by the Police for wandering the streets. This behaviour is unfortunately often an escape from some form of family abuse.

In **Jamaica** members were glad to see the long awaited 'Child Care Protection Act' implemented and passed in both houses of the Parliament. The Act is intended to protect children from abuse and neglect and includes the creation of a Child Advocate that operates as an Ombudsman for Children with great powers.

In **India**, the club of **Chennai** began a new programme organising panel discussions on trafficking of women and girl children. Women who had themselves been trafficked courageously agreed to share their views with the panelists. Issues raised were the lack of trust, sense of betrayal, guilt and shame of the victims and how the legal language needs to be sensitised.

In **South Africa** where abused and

(Continued on page 5)

# Combating Trafficking of Women & Girls

(Continued from page 4)

destitute women and children are greatly at risk, **SI Cape of Good Hope's** Centre is providing a safe haven whilst **SI Tshwane's** Lerato House is an interim residence for girls between 11 to 17 years of age who are in crisis.

In **Sri Lanka**, **SI Columbo's** Wijerama Street Children's project which started fourteen years ago and was designed to provide for children with no fixed abode is still successfully providing pre-school education; - since the Tsunami their work will be even more necessary.

In **Zimbabwe** as the numbers of orphans to AIDS increases and already stretched families are asked to take on yet more relatives, the problem of street children also increases. There is now a new generation of children who have never known any other home but the street with all its attendant safety risks. **SI Harare** and **SI Vabatsiri** are both involved in giving social and food support.



## SEX TOURISM

Soroptimist International members are mindful that children engaged in the commercial sex industry or suffering sexual abuse are at risk from infection and sexually transmitted diseases and subjected to intimidation and violence. Many clubs have lobbied their government representatives for legislative changes to enable those men who travel abroad for sex with children to be apprehended and punished on their return to their home country.

One such club is **SI Douglas, Isle of Man**. Douglas members campaigned for the introduction of legislation to enable paedophiles to be prosecuted in the Isle of Man for offences committed abroad. They lent support to their local representative who sought to bring a Private Members Bill before the Island's Parliament, - the

Sexual Offences (Jurisdiction) Bill. The Club's delegate to the Island's Joint Women's Council sought the support of the Council and the members circulated leaflets about problems in South East Asia.

Another in **France**, **SI Nevers**, organised a public lecture by Sister Michelle, leader of the 'Fountain de Vie' at Pattaya, Thailand. She spoke of her actions to help children who are victims of sexual tourism. In response the club created 2 sponsorships and proposed to send a nurse to work in Thailand.

## AND EVEN ONE WOMAN CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

One woman, - a Soroptimist, - seized the opportunity when she was invited to take part in a live radio broadcast. The topic was the opening of a Lap Dance Club in her town plus the possibility of a three day sex show in the town's International Arena.

Our Soroptimist noted in a handout that the lap dancers included local women and women from all over Europe. She challenged the Club's owner on the source of the women who were to work there. Were they there of their own volition? What were their living and working conditions? What were their terms of employment? What did he know of the agency that supplied them?

## HE HAD NO ANSWERS

Following the broadcast the local authority did not grant permission for the sex show and the club owner invited the Soroptimist to see conditions at his club for herself and was surprised when she took up his offer.

So, - how should we proceed to find out about girls and women in similar situations without putting them in further danger? There are clubs in many of our towns just like this example that would not stand up to scrutiny.

Our members are committed to taking a lead in demanding this scrutiny from their licensing authorities. Learning, lobbying and being prepared to speak out in support of women's and girls' human rights

whenever the opportunity presents itself.

## BUI DOI

### the Dust of Life?

Each year the President of Soroptimist International selects a project that provides direct assistance to women and girls in extreme need.

This year Soroptimist International is partnering with Children of Peace International to restore life to the young women and children living in the Ho Chi Minh Youth Shelter.



'Children of Peace

International' wants to restore the lives of these 500 forgotten Vietnamese children to 'normal'. The normality for which these children are craving is to be loved, respected and allowed to grow up in peace.

Vietnam's civil war ended in 1975 and the country found itself isolated from the free world. Families struggled to survive amidst the aftermath of war and the economic situation. The dust of war settled and children became *bui doi* - dust of life - of no value whatsoever. As poverty took its toll, more and more children became the real victims of Vietnam's war. Fami-

(Continued on page 6)

# Combating Trafficking of Women & Girls

lies struggled. Children became burdens and little more than bui doi. Impoverished Vietnamese parents realised that they could train their children to beg and to steal. Many Vietnamese parents sold their children as a means of survival... with children as young as 2 years of age sold into slavery, prostitution and child labour. Bui doi became Vietnam's post-war financial resource.

**But Vietnam's working children become 'too old'. They contract HIV/AIDS and become 'too sick'. As these children fail to perform adequately and contribute economically, their pimps again realise that they are only bui doi and throw them back to the streets of Ho Chi Minh City.**

In 1993 Binh Rybacki, - who had been evacuated by the American government in the days before the fall of Saigon to the Communist troops, - returned to Vietnam to make peace with her home country. She found children working as street peddlers, beggars and prostitutes. Unable to leave things as she found them Binh began Children of Peace to improve the lives of these abandoned children. Over the years her commitment and organisation grew. Children of Peace International's eleven orphanages have helped more than 4,500 children.



A small meagre shelter stands only about 10 miles northeast of Ho Chi Minh City. It is home to over 500 young

women and children ranging in age from 8 to 18. These are the bui doi who became 'too old' or 'too sick' and survived in the streets, under bridges, in gutters and in landfills.

- These young people are children 'without a country' because they have no birth certificates or citizenship papers
- Between 1/3 and 1/2 of these young people have contracted HIV/AIDS while enduring their forced lifestyles

'Children of Peace International' became involved with the Youth Shelter in 2002. In March 2004 their medical team provided medical care for all children and volunteered their day off to clean the dormitory and paint the beds. Children of Peace agreed to supplement government services by providing teachers and two additional meals and a snack for each Youth Shelter child on a daily basis.

And now, it is Soroptimist International's turn to help. All proceeds from the 2004 10<sup>th</sup> December President's Appeal will go to ensuring that the children in the Ho Chi Minh will gain a restored sense of self worth and become contributing members of society.

## CHILD PORNOGRAPHY SYMPOSIUM

**SI Tokyo-Azuma with the support of the Japan Higashi Region** sponsored a symposium of child Pornography in March 2005.

**Theme: "Child Pornography: Victimization on the Internet(The State of Internet Victims, Psychological Analysis of Offenders, and How to Cope with Them".**

The keynote speakers were Dr. Ethel Quayle, Professor of University College Cork, Ireland, Acting Director of Combating Pedophile Information Networks in Europe (COPINE PROJECT) Joint Author with Prof. Max Tyler, special speaker for the 2nd World Conference against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in many of her books: Child Pornography and the Internet, Perpetuating a cycle of Abuse, Pedophiles, Pornography and the Internet, etc.

The Club worked in partnership with ECPAT/STOP JAPAN and UNICEF Office in JAPAN, and others.

## WORKSHOP EXAMPLES

**CSW, New York March 2000**

**Congress on the Prevention of Crime, Vienna, April 2000**

Soroptimist International held successful workshops in New York with *Miramed* and solely in Vienna disseminating the message of this violation against girls and women to sister delegates and to government representatives

# Women: Counteraction and Prevention

## Kishinau, Republic of Moldova

7 – 10 October 2004

Women from 12 European countries and the USA participated in a conference, 'Trafficking on Women: Counteraction and Prevention' initiated by Sorooptimist International of Chisinau, Moldova and the Union of Norway.

In her introduction, the President of Sorooptimist International of Chisinau, Maria Saharneanu spoke of the exodus of her country women from Moldova and the consequences on the destiny of her country.

The transition period of ex-Soviet countries such as Moldova and particularly the political problems related to the Transnistria conflict had left the eastern borders of Moldova uncontrolled for over ten years. Economically it is one of the poorest countries in Europe with 86% of the population living on less than \$1 a day.

It is estimated that more than half of the population able to work have left the country in search of employment. Maria cited the depletion of her own extended family, three brothers all working illegally in different countries to keep their families from starvation.

Whole villages have been deserted.

Many professional women have left Moldova sometimes leaving grandparents to bring up their children—at other times the children are left to take care of themselves. Family breakdown is common and alcoholism is rife.

A high proportion of young women without qualifications attracted by promises of jobs are easy prey for traffickers. Many are murdered or commit suicide and even those who subsequently escape the traffickers are left physically and emotionally impaired.

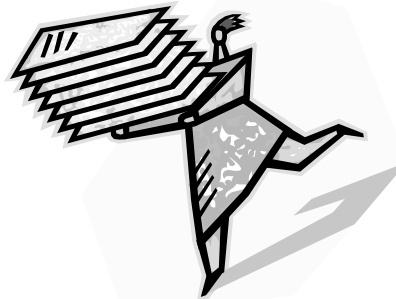
Maria rejected the notion that traf-

ficking is the same as prostitution, 'the oldest profession' or entered into voluntarily. She asserted that trafficking is a result of economic discrimination of women; the result of a lack of equal opportunities and a serious infringement of human rights. As Trafficking is everybody's problem, it can only be counteracted if countries of origin, of transit and of destination work together for its eradication. Nor can politics be excluded from the equation; - trafficking exists wherever there are conflicts and conflicts are usually the result of political policies.

The Conference could be termed a 'scream for help', an appeal for solidarity in fighting an abuse that is a dishonour to human dignity.

She pledged that Sorooptimists from Chisinau are ready to become involved in fighting this scourge.

The outcomes of the Conference were an Appeal and a Resolution.



*The Resolution expressed solidarity with the victims of trafficking and condemnation of abuses against women and girls in all its forms.*

*The Conference urged that the following actions be undertaken at international, national and local levels.*

*Magnifying and consolidating efforts against trafficking in women and girls*

*Acting to raise awareness of damage caused by trafficking in women and girls*

*Addressing demand as a major cause of trafficking*

*Developing, adopting and improving trafficking legislation, application and enforcement*

*Improving educational, logistical and material assistance for police and justice bodies*

*Improving services and rehabilitation assistance to victims, giving them the opportunity to either stay in the destination country or return to their country of origin*

*Developing special policies for social reintegration of trafficking victims*

*Developing educational strategies as women trafficking prevention instruments*

*Encouraging and supporting civil society engaged in the fight against trafficking in women and girls*

*Providing adequate resources to prevent and combat trafficking in women and girls*

*Promoting and implementing gender equality policies and programmes for women and men*

*Improving the economic situation and creation of new employment possibilities in the countries of origin and transit of trafficking in women and girls*

Booklet Compiled by SI Programme Team

Margaret Alderson, Lois Sagel

## WHO is

### SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL?

Soroptimist International (SI) is an international service club organization for women in management and professions, working to advance human rights and the status of women and girls. Soroptimist International has more than 3000 clubs in 125 countries and territories.

### what is their purpose?

Since 1921, Soroptimists have worked to improve the lives of women and girls and are committed to serving women and girls in local, national and international communities through our programme strategies. Soroptimists seek to be a global voice for women through awareness, advocacy and action.

Through Soroptimist International quadrennial Programme of Service, projects are carried out in the areas of Human Rights and the Status of Women, through Education, Economic and Social Development, Environment, Health and International Goodwill and Understanding.

Soroptimist International members are encouraged to be aware of and involved in issues of society. They address a wide spectrum of women's concerns professionally and voluntarily, working with all levels of civil society including states, governments, the UN System, non-governmental organizations, as well as other actors of civil society including business. SI is non party-political and non-sectarian.

### partnerships

Soroptimist International holds General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council, United Nations (ECOSOC);

Operational Relations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); Special List of the International Labour Organisation (ILO); Official Relations with the World Health Organisation (WHO), Official Relations with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); Consultative Status with the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO).

Soroptimist International is also a Board member of CONGO and a member of the Commonwealth. SI has representatives at the United Nations Centres in New York, Paris, Geneva, Vienna, Rome, Nairobi and the Regional Commissions. SI works in partnership as an international non-government organization.

### commitment

Soroptimist International reaffirms its commitment in principle to the:

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; Women 2000 Outcome Document; Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Convention on the Rights of the Child; UNCED Agenda 21 World Declaration and Plan of Action; Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); United Nations Millennium Development Goals; Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.

Soroptimist International works in partnership with states, governments, inter-governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, all aspects of civil society including business, and the United Nations and its Agencies in implementing the objectives agreed by governments in these important documents.

Soroptimist  International

Joan Cromer, President 2003-2005

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