

Soroptimist International Annual Report 2023



Global Policy excerpt



Global Policy

**Maureen Maguire, SI President 2022-2023,
Hana Smith, SI Global Policy Advisor**

SI is dedicated to educating, empowering and enabling women and girls to realise their individual and collective potential.

Since 1984, SI has held General Consultative Status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Currently, only 138 organisations out of 6,494 organisations with representation at the UN, hold the same status. Importantly, only 13 of these organisations focus specifically on advancing the human rights of all women and girls, including SI.

SI's voice at the UN has never been so critical. With the rollback of women's and girls' rights around the world, our team of volunteer Representatives continue to dedicate themselves to ensure that SI truly is a Global Voice for Women.

SI has a global team of volunteer Representatives to the UN, which grew from 19 to 24 at the end of 2023. Among our 24 UN Representatives, two are designated Youth Representatives – one in New York, and one in Nairobi.

SI's Representatives work across seven UN duty stations, to advance the rights of all women and girls across thematic areas, with specific focus on working to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4, on Quality Education, and SDG 5, on Gender Equality.



Global Policy continued



SI UN Representative Centres

New York

New York is home to the Headquarters of the UN, and in 2023, SI's team comprised Bette Levy, Frances Zainoeddin, María Fornella-Oehninger, Jackie Shapiro and Vanesa Treers.

Bette Levy is the team's focal point. In 2023, SI was appointed the role of Global Organising Partner for the Women's Major Group (WMG) at the UN. Bette worked tirelessly to facilitate participation in global policy among all members of the WMG. In addition to this role, Bette remained active in other coalitions working on language and advocacy task groups to push back against regressive language on gender equality.

María participated in the 61st Session of the UN Commission on Social Development (CSocD) by planning events, drafting a written statement, and she was an active member of the Advocacy and Education Sub-Committees of the NGO CSocD Committee. María delivered a statement at a WMG event in September on a rights-centred gender-transformative economy and was a speaker at various events throughout the year.

Jackie served her role as the Treasurer of the NGO Committee to Stop Trafficking which works to develop awareness and disseminate best practices of bankrupting the business of human trafficking and encouraging the development and use of data to determine programmes and policies.

Jackie and María also participated in the Open-Ended Working Group to End Homelessness, which was successful in advocating with Member States to expand issues of human rights of homeless persons. Due to the efforts of this Group, the UN Secretary-General is now mandated to report on the progress and challenges on commitments to address homelessness, every two years.

Frances' work at the UN focuses on the rights of older women and issues that call for and have implications for empowering women and girls. She served as the Vice-Chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing in New York until the end of her term in August 2023. Frances is dedicated to one day accomplishing the establishment of a Convention to Protect the Rights of Older Persons via this Committee.

The team was also involved in the 67th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the High-Level Political Forum, the SDG Summit, and the preparations for the Summit of the Future which will be held in September 2024. Another notable moment was the UN Water Conference which was held in March 2023 – the first time in 47 years.

Vanesa Treers worked closely with the NGO CSW Committee in New York before stepping down as SI UN Representative in September 2023. To address the gap and expand the team, SI appointed three new Representatives to the New York team in December 2023, one of whom is a Youth Representative.

Global Policy continued

Geneva

The UN in Geneva can be considered the organisation's 'second' Headquarters and the 'Capital of Peace'. It is home to the UN's human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council, CEDAW Committee (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which SI's Representatives in Geneva follow.

SI's Representatives in Geneva are members of NGO CSW Geneva, a Committee that works on the UN Commission on the Status of Women and liaises with UN Women.

Berthe De Vos-Neven was the focal point of SI's team in Geneva. She was Vice President of NGO CSW Geneva; she also followed the CEDAW Committee and delivered an intervention during the 86th Session in October 2023.

Donatella Benjamin was a member of the NGO Committee on Ageing Geneva, participating in a range of events including on the health of older persons and the impacts of climate change on older women. She also attended many Sessions of the Human Rights Council with Berthe, who submitted reports on the progress or failures of specific countries under review.

Stacy Ciulik attended several sessions of the Human Rights Council and travelled across Switzerland to educate Soroptimist Clubs about SI's global policy work at the UN.

Berthe De Vos-Neven, Main Representative to the UN in Geneva says:

"We are making major progress in establishing Soroptimist International as a professional NGO on topics of women's rights, being acknowledged as an appreciated and valued member."

Photo: SI UN Representative team in Geneva, with 2023 SI President Maureen Maguire at a NGO CSW Geneva event on the International Day of Peace, celebrated every year on 21 September

From left to right:
Berthe De Vos-Neven, Donatella Benjamin, SI President Maureen Maguire, Stacy Ciulik



Global Policy continued

Vienna

SI has a team of four UN Representatives in Vienna who are actively engaged in the work of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. In 2023, they submitted a written statement on women and girl's access to justice.

Members of the team served in leadership positions throughout 2023, including Marion Prechtl as Treasurer of the Committee on Sustainable Development, Christine Peer as Vice-Chair of NGO CSW Vienna, and Dr. Martina Gredler completed her second term as Second Vice President of CoNGO (Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations), which celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2023. Marcella Sigmund returned as a Representative in the Vienna team and has become involved in the Committee on Ageing.

Marion Prechtl, Main Representative to the UN in Vienna says:

"It is important for us to deal with the key issues at the UN in Vienna in the spirit of Soroptimist International and to raise our voices for all women and girls. The focus in Vienna is on drugs and crime in all its forms, including violence against women, terrorism, human trafficking, illegal migration, illegal arms trafficking, crimes against the environment and more. We must continue to draw attention to the extent to which women and girls are affected and the impact these issues have on their lives."



Photo of SI Vienna UN Representative team

From left to right:
Christine Peer, Marion Prechtl,
Marcella Sigmund, and Dr. Martina
Gredler

Global Policy continued

Nairobi

The Nairobi team of UN Representatives comprised Mary Muia and Betty Oluoch in 2023. With the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) stationed in Nairobi, the focus of SI's team here is on the environment, climate change, disaster risk management, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

The Women's Major Group in Nairobi, on which SI's UN Representatives sit, stressed the importance of ensuring diverse perspectives across all environmental policy. They called for a globally harmonised mechanism for tracking toxic chemicals in plastics and urged Member States to prioritise health and human rights, advocating for a Treaty covering the entire life cycle of plastics.

In December 2023, SI appointed three new Representatives to the team, one of whom is a Youth Representative, to expand SI's presence moving forward into 2024.

Mary Muia, Main Representative to the UN in Nairobi says:

"My interest subject is how global legislation on the environment and food security impacts women and girls. It is an honour to volunteer at this high-level role to contribute to the empowerment of women and girls globally on behalf of SI."

Paris

Evelyne Para, Marie-Christine Gries and Rina Dupriet are SI's three representatives at UNESCO in Paris. Throughout 2023, the team participated in several conferences and events focusing on education, technology, science and culture. In November, UNESCO adopted a new Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development.

This Recommendation is unique as it considers all aspects of education and its intersection with digital technology, climate change, gender equality, and fundamental human rights.

In December, UNESCO held the 42nd Session of its General Conference – an annual conference where all Member States come together to discuss the means of achieving universal education, the challenges of new technologies, and how to address the severe impacts of the climate crisis.



*Photo: SI's UN Representative team in Paris, attending the 42nd Session of the UNESCO General Conference
From left to right:
Marie-Christine Gries, Evelyne Para and Rina Dupriet*

Global Policy continued

Rome

SI's Representative to the UN in Rome, Liliana Mosca, attended various meetings at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) throughout 2023. However, since the beginning of the year, the UN centre in Rome has been in an unstable situation and civil society organisations like SI are limited in their access to meetings. Despite this, Liliana attended several meetings of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' organisations (CSIPM), which works to eradicate food insecurity and malnutrition.



Photo: Liliana Mosca holds the FAO flag at its Headquarters in Rome

Bangkok

Dr. Theresa Devasahayam, SI's Representative to the UN in Bangkok, attended the 79th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The 2023 theme was "Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development".

During the session, UN Member States recognised the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a blueprint to drive the necessary transformation in Asia and the Pacific in response to the Region's main challenges, including food insecurity, energy and finance, and acknowledged the importance of boosting partnerships that strengthen multilateralism and international cooperation and scaling up ambition to achieve the SDGs. Theresa attended other events focusing on decent work, the environment, and social and economic development.

During 2023, Soroptimist International:

- Had a team of 19 UN Representatives
- Had 7 Representatives in leadership roles
- Was active in 7 duty stations
- Participated in 20+ Commissions and Annual/Regional meetings
- Delivered 17 statements
- Signed 28 written statements

Global Policy continued

Advocacy Advisors

Each SI President appoints SI Advocacy Advisors who support on specific work to advance SI's global profile in various ways. In 2023, SI President Maureen Maguire appointed three Advocacy Advisors: Bev Bucur, Pat Black, and Linda Witong.

Bev Bucur

Bev Bucur represents Soroptimist International on Women for Water Partnership (WfWP). SI works together with WfWP to create awareness that clean water is a limited resource, and that safe drinking water and sanitation are essential to good health. SI continues to advocate for the need to include women in all levels of water management. During the autumn of 2022, Bev joined former SI President and President of Women for Water Partnership, Mariet Verhoef-Cohen in New York to plan for the 2023 Water Forum. Bev delivered a statement at the Forum calling on UN Member States to take urgent action to include women in leadership positions across the water sector.

Bev also continues to support Soroptimist International more broadly via its Headquarters, by sharing her wealth of knowledge with staff members. Bev also participates on the SI Global Policy and Global Impact Committees.



Photo: Bev Bucur

Pat Black

Continuing and expanding the work on a new platform for SI at international level, Pat Black was re-appointed as a W7 Gender Equality Advisor for the Group of 7 (G7) Japan Presidency in January 2023. The G7 was led in 2023 by the Japanese Prime Minister and the W7 2023 was headed by a consortium of Japanese NGOs supported by some of the NGO leaders for Women 7 (W7) 2022 from Germany.

Through Pat, SI was able to contribute text to the W7 Communiqué, which included recommendations to prevent gender-based violence. The W7 Communiqué was presented to the Japanese President at the W7 Summit in May 2023, ahead of the G7 Summit of Leaders in June.

NGOs in all the G7 countries, including SI, will continue to monitor and comment on whether these high-profile countries act on the recommendations W7 presented, to improve the lives of all women and girls.

With her experience, Pat was also able to mentor Soroptimists from the Italian Union during 2023 so that they could participate and take NGO leadership roles for the G7 Summit 2024 which will be headed by the Italian Prime Minister.



Photo: Pat Black

Global Policy continued

Advocacy Advisors continued

Linda Witong

Linda Witong volunteers an average of 6 to 8 hours a day preparing language and citations for various issues as they arise for SI. Since late March 2023, Linda gathered language on issues regarding poverty by year and topic in CSW outcome documents, UN reports and other relevant sources, adding citations for each one if needed during deliberations prior to or during CSW68 (2024).

Linda also prepared research for SI on other topics and virtually attended meetings being held in Vienna. She represents SI on the Board of the Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. Linda also took an active role in the Working Group on Gender-Based Violence as Torture Inflicted by Non-State Actors (NST) which issued a Working Paper on NST in December 2023.



Photo: Linda Witong

We are indebted to Bev, Pat and Linda for the support and help they contributed during 2023.

W7 – Women 7

Women 7 (W7) has been an official engagement group of the G7 Summit since 2018 and enables worldwide civil society organisations to come together to promote proposals on gender equality and women's rights to the governments within the G7 countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. The 2023 W7 and G7 were hosted by Japan.

SI was once again pleased to support the application of Pat Black, SI Advocacy Advisor to become an active member of the W7 working groups. The 2023 W7 had 90 representatives from feminist organisations and they worked on five working groups that focused on women's empowerment, economic justice, abortion and gender identity, feminist foreign policy and financing gender equality.



Global Policy continued

Beyond our work at the United Nations, SI has expanded and strengthened its scope of Global Policy work, including through the establishment of the SI Youth Forum and Data Sub-Group.



SI Youth Forum

The SI Youth Forum is a community that was established in 2023 under SI President Maureen Maguire. The Forum was created for young Soroptimists (aged 40 years and under) to engage with each other at the international level by sharing ideas, advocating to fulfill the rights of all women and girls, and contributing, where possible, to SI's global policy and advocacy work more broadly to ensure a youth perspective is always present.

Upon its inception, the Forum was led by a group of six young Soroptimists from across all SI Federations, plus the support of the SI Global Policy Advisor and President Maureen Maguire. The Forum delivered its first webinar in October 2023, entitled 'Green Horizons', which discussed climate adaptation strategies being implemented by women.

SI-Data Sub Group

The SI-Data Sub Group was also established in 2023 as a mechanism to enable the SI UN Representatives to have easier access to data gathered from SI Club projects. The Group is considered a 'sub-group' of the Global Policy Committee and comprises of representation from each of the five SI Federations, the SI Global Policy Advisor, Director of Advocacy and the SI Chair of Global Policy, who chairs the group.



**a global
voice for
women**

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