

# Trafficking – a concern for Soroptimist across the world

By Laurie Brazil

“Hopes and Dreams for Everyone” is the appeal to Soroptimist members worldwide to work together collaboratively to prevent violence against women and children. This week Soroptimist International of Tahoe Sierra hosted an international member, Rita Offerson, who shared the vision of her Hillerod Soroptimistklub in her hometown in Denmark which is working to address this issue.

In today’s globalized and changing world, it is time to make a difference by addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls – to promote women’s equality and ensure that rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled.

According to the United Nation’s Secretary General-Ban Ki-mooni, “Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women’s lives, on their families and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned”.

The facts in evidence are that violence against women occurs every day in every country in the world. Every woman faces the possibility of violence but those from indigenous, ethnic, indigent, or other minority communities are even more at risk. Lack of access to economic and social rights such as education, land and housing as well as discrimination and violations of civil rights increase women’s vulnerability.

One of the worst forms of violence against women and girls is human trafficking; 66 percent of those trafficked are women and 13 percent are girls. Humans are trafficked for many reasons – although most reported cases of trafficking involve

sexual exploitation, but trafficking for forced labor is also rapidly growing, rarely reported, and much harder to detect, with trafficked persons working in 'invisible' locations, such as agricultural fields in rural areas, mining camps, garment factories, or within closed environments of the home in domestic servitude.

Some of the projects and ideas that these clubs bring to life are providing life-skill education and sustainable living conditions for women and vulnerable children. The aim is to give young girls knowledge about the danger of trafficking, access to education, a place to live, work possibilities, and an economy that enables them to maintain a decent way of living in familiar surroundings.

"There was so much need to reach out to the girls, to empower them and give them hope. We realized that they needed food, counseling, clothes, skills and much more" states a Women in Crisis.

Protecting women and girls from violence is central to the attainment of women's human rights therefore women's rights organizations, such as Soroptimist International, were pivotal in first drawing these issues out of the private domain and into the spotlight of the public eye. In fact, a recent convention in Reno featured a well informed and riveting speaker, Truckee Police Chief Nicolas Sensley, who focused directly on this concerning issue.

Both South Shore Soroptimist clubs endeavor to make a difference by inspiring and taking action to improve the status of women and girls through their projects, at local, national, regional, and international levels. Together, we can add to the worldwide effort to learn more about what works by collecting stories and sharing these conditions. Rita not only enjoyed our unique beauty of the Lake Tahoe area, which she will share back in her native country, but also illustrated that we can join our voices together for international

advocacy efforts. We can contribute to worldwide learning about the different forms of violence women and girls around the world experience, and our combined forces are critical to developing and implementing successful interventions.

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