a global voice for women Soroptimist International

SI PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE 2011

DECEMBER 10TH

Today is Human Rights Day, commemorating December 10th, 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. This day holds a special place in Soroptimist International's history, from 1981, when SI President Catherine Salt chose a project on the island of Pulau Bidong, Malaysia, to help refugee women and children.

This year on Human Rights Day, December 10th, I would like to invite Soroptimists worldwide to join together to support a very special project under our international programme of work, "Educate to Lead".

For the very first time, we have a Soroptimist project that was created in SI South West Pacific and became a federation project before being selected as the 2011 December 10th Appeal project. This project is called 'Birthing in the Pacific' and works to increase the skills and education of health professionals and birth attendants in Papua New Guinea with the goal of reducing maternal mortality and morbidity. This project supports Millennium Development Goal #5 which is to improve maternal health.

Papua New Guinea has the second highest maternal and infant mortality rate in the Asia/Pacific! What is shocking is that 88-98% of these deaths could be prevented with improvements and investments to health care systems. The overall maternal mortality rate in PNG is 733 deaths per 100,000 live births. Most deaths occur in the first 24-48 hours after delivery. Untreated, deaths occur, on average, within 2 hours from post partum hemorrhage, within12 hours from ante-partum hemorrhage, within 2 days from obstructed labor, and within 7-10 days from infection. How sad it is that in a developing country where there are over 1,000 births each month there is an expectation that mothers and babies will die from pregnancy complications. What is even more tragic is that 40% of the clinics in PNG have closed due to lack of funding.

What will your donations do to support Birthing in the Pacific?

- Your donation of $1 USD can provide an obstetric wheel. This is a calendar that uses events such as Christmas and Easter to help birth attendants and pregnant women work out a due date so that they know when to go to a facility and deliver.

- Your donation of $100 USD can provide

- A clinical birth attendant with a 'Karum work bilum' which is a pouch of essential work tools for safe deliveries….or
- Provide buckets and goggles to a "class" of village birth attendant graduates to ensure clean deliveries for those unable to make it to a birthing center

- Your donation of $300 USD can
  - Send a registered midwife to a Midwives' Society professional development course….or
  - Cover costs for village (traditional) birth attendants to attend a local training course covering basic reproductive health care and hygiene….or
  - Support community health workers to attend a five month Department of Health maternal competency course.

The December 10th Appeal always takes place on Human Rights Day and requests that Soroptimists worldwide give up something of importance on this day and donate what would have been spent to the December 10th Appeal project. Perhaps it is a glass of wine, maybe a movie, or a special dinner or lunch at your favorite bistro (Back in 1984, SI President Catherine Salt suggested giving up a packet of cigarettes!). Soroptimists are caring and generous. Imagine what a difference that sacrifice can make to the realisation of the rights to life, health, and safe motherhood for the women in PNG. As we educate, empower and enable these birth attendants, your donations will be saving women's lives….LITERALLY. Thank you for your support of this very worthwhile project.

For more information, please visit http://www.soroptimistinternational.org/our-projects/december-10-appeal/birthinginpacific.

Alice Wells

SI President 2011 - 2013