



Soroptimist and the United Nations

UN Questions & Answers

1. How long has the UN been in existence?

The United Nations (UN) was established on October 24, 1945 by 51 countries committed to preserving peace through international cooperation and collective security. Today, 192 nations in the world belong to the UN.

2. What is the UN Charter?

The UN Charter is an international treaty that sets out basic principles of international relations for its member nations. It has four purposes: to maintain international peace and security; to develop friendly relations among nations; to cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights; and to be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations.

3. Are there certain agencies within the UN that focus specifically on girls and women?

Yes. Until June 30, 2010, there were four main UN bodies focused on women: The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) provided financial support and technical assistance to programs promoting women's rights, their economic and political empowerment, and gender equality; The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) developed research and training programs that contributed to the empowerment of women; The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) analyzed gender issues, promoted women's human rights and coordinated outreach; and the Office of the Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) developed new strategies and programs to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women in all sectors of society. However, on July 2, 2010 the United Nations General Assembly voted unanimously to merge these bodies into one entity titled the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, or UN Women.

In addition to the newly established UN Women, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) advocates and works for the protection of the rights of mothers. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) oversees UN activities and policies promoting human rights. Finally, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) documents patterns of discrimination against women and girls worldwide.

4. What led to UN Women's formation?

In 2006, former Secretary-General Kofi Annan convened a System-Wide Coherence Panel to explore how the UN system – including entities that address

gender equality – could be strengthened in terms of coherence and coordination. In response, the Gender Equality Architecture Reform, also known as the GEAR Campaign, formed. It is a mobilization of women's groups—including Soroptimist International—that advocated for the adoption of a new single UN entity for gender equality. After four years of advocacy, GEAR celebrated the United Nations General Assembly's unanimous resolution to establish a United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to be called, UN Women. The resolution was agreed to on June 30, 2010 and formally adopted on July 2, 2010. Going forward, GEAR will focus on the transition process and implementation, ensuring that the new body has the human and financial resources necessary to succeed. For more information on GEAR, please visit <<http://www.gearcampaign.org/>>

5. How will UN Women operate?

With the creation of UN Women, the four main UN bodies on women (UNIFEM, INSTRAW, DAW, and OSAGI) will cease to exist as separate entities. However, all of their objectives and functions will form the basis of UN Women. Consolidating the bodies into one entity will increase resources and mandates for greater and more efficient impact. UN Women will be headquartered in New York and led by an Under-Secretary-General appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The Under-Secretary-General will be a member of all senior UN decision-making bodies and report directly to the UN Secretary-General. UN Women's main objectives will be to support inter-governmental bodies, such as CSW, formulate policies, global standards, and norms; to help Member States implement these standards, technically and financially; and to enable Member States to hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments to gender equality. To read more on UN Women, please visit <<http://www.unwomen.org/>>.

6. What is the relationship of Soroptimist with the UN?

Article 17 of the UN Charter provides non-governmental organization (NGO) consultative status with the ECOSOC. Nearly 3,000 NGOs hold this status, including SI. This enables SI representatives to request the addition of an item on ECOSOC's agenda, submit written statements for circulation to all members of the council, make oral statements at ECOSOC meetings, and contribute to other UN gatherings and seminars. It is in this forum that SI representatives can advocate for the Soroptimist mission. SI has volunteer

representatives at the major UN centers in New York City, Geneva and Paris.

7. Where can I find out more information about the UN?

For more information please visit: <www.un.org>.

More information is available on UN Women at <<http://www.unwomen.org/>>, on UNICEF at <<http://www.unicef.org/>>, on ECOSOC at <<http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/>>, and on CSW at <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/>>. For information on Soroptimist and the UN, please see the Program Notes in SIA's magazine *Best for Women*, the SIA web site at <www.soroptimist.org>, and the SI web site at <www.soroptimistinternational.org>.

CEDAW

Often described as the bill of rights for women, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) seeks to improve the lives of women everywhere. The framing of the document took more than 16 years and was opened for signature on July 17, 1980. CEDAW defines discrimination against women and outlines an agenda for national action to end discrimination. It is a comprehensive document addressing issues such as health, education, legal and political rights, trafficking in women and girls, and the role of culture and tradition in sex role stereotyping.

CEDAW challenges traditional state responsibility, obligating states that ratify to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise—not only discrimination by the state or its agents. The Convention also creates a committee to monitor implementation and compliance.

Since the Convention was first opened for signature, SIA has advocated for ratification. All SIA countries have ratified CEDAW except for the United States, which has signed but not ratified. Ratification in the United States is a crucial step in advancing CEDAW. For more information and to read CEDAW, please visit <<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/index.htm>>. Please also read Soroptimist's paper, *CEDAW and the United States*, available the Soroptimist website.

What can Soroptimist do about CEDAW?

In the United States:

- At each club meeting, allocate time to writing letters or emails to Senate Foreign Relations Committee members urging them to voice support for CEDAW and to vote against the 11 Reservations, Declarations and Understandings.
- Write letters to newspapers explaining the importance of CEDAW and demanding its passage.
- Form coalitions with other organizations working for the ratification of CEDAW.

Other Countries:

- Pressure the government to withdraw any reservations (legal objections to parts of the Convention).
- Be active in monitoring compliance of CEDAW, including partnering with other monitoring organizations.

- NGOs are encouraged to write reports about their government's compliance with CEDAW. For more information on producing shadow reports, go to <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/protocol/mo-delform-E.PDF>>.

International Women's Day

International Women's Day, March 8th, is observed around the world. International Women's Day is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society and the political process on equal footing with men. Since the very beginning of this century, women have utilized International Women's Day as a rallying point to demand women's rights. It is a day to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination in pursuit of women's rights. There are different ways to celebrate International Women's Day, for example:

- Hold a club program focusing on the history of women's pursuit for equal rights around the world.
- Sponsor an assembly at a local school on the history of women's struggles around the world.
- Hold a club Live Your Dream recognition event for the Soroptimist Live Your Dream: Education and Training Awards for Women (formerly Women's Opportunity Awards), Violet Richardson Award, and the Ruby Award: For Women Helping Women award recipients.
- Send a news release to local newspapers about International Women's Day and what the club will do to recognize the day.
- Conduct a workshop for girls utilizing the theme of SIA's *Live Your Dream Campaign*.

Millennium Development Goals

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, 191 member nations agreed to make the elimination of poverty and the fulfillment of human rights their highest priorities. The countries designed eight Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs set out to accelerate human development, achieve universal equality, and attain a more peaceful world by 2015. Each goal has targets that need to be achieved each year prior to 2015. The MDGs give the entire United Nations system a coherent set of achievable goals to work toward. The eight goals are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

For more information about the goals and the targets, visit the web site at <<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>>.

Security Council Resolution 1325

On October 31, 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. This was the first time that the Security Council specifically addressed

the effects of war on women and girls and the role that they should play in conflict resolution and peace building. Resolution 1325 calls for the consideration of the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstructions. In addition, all UN member states are provided with training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and particular needs of women, as well as on the importance of involving women in all peacekeeping and peace building measures. For more information go to <http://www.peacewomen.org/security_council_monitor/>.

UN Project Ideas for Clubs

- Support UN programs that benefit women and girls through volunteer work, contributions and advocacy.
- Provide a local school with a speaker and an educational film from a UN organization that focuses on women and girls.
- Support the passage and implementation of CEDAW.

- Have club meetings about world issues, UN agencies, and/or federation and international projects.
- Plan an educational event to celebrate International Women’s Day.
- Advocate for the government’s progress on achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
- Advocate for the UN’s compliance with Security Council Resolution 1325.
- Participate in the Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence or Soroptimists STOP Trafficking, both of which fall on UN days.

Select List of UN Special Observances		
March	8	International Women’s Day
September	21	International Day of Peace
November	25	International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
December	2	International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
	10	Human Rights Day