



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, 191 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?

Although various agencies and organs within the UN work for peace and human rights, several focus on issues important to women. For example, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) provides financial support and technical assistance to programs promoting women's rights, their economic and political empowerment, and gender equality. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) advocates and works for the protection of children's rights, including the rights of mothers. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) oversees UN activities and policies promoting human rights. The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) analyzes gender issues, promotes women's human rights and coordinates outreach. Finally, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) documents patterns of discrimination against women and girls worldwide.

4. 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. More than 1,000 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, advancing the status of women and girls. SI has volunteer representatives at the major UN centers in New York City, Geneva and Paris.

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

More information on the UN is available at <www.un.org>, on UNIFEM at <www.unifem.org>, and on CSW and DAW at <www.un.org/womenwatch/>. For information on Soroptimist and the UN, please see the Program Notes in *Soroptimist of the Americas* magazine, the SIA web site at <www.soroptimist.org>, the SI web site at <www.soroptimistinternational.org> and the SI program

web site at <www.soroptimistglobalvoice.com> or contact the program department at SIA headquarters.

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) is a detailed international agreement that seeks to improve the lives of women everywhere. The framing of the document took more than 16 years, was adopted by the UN General Assembly at the conclusion of the 34th session, and was opened for signature at a special ceremony on July 17, 1980. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines discrimination against women and outlines an agenda for national action to end discrimination. It is a comprehensive document addressing such issues 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 25 member 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, go to <www.un.org/womenwatch/>.

What can Soroptimist do about CEDAW?

In the United States:

- At each club meeting, allocate time to writing letters to senators, urging them to call Senate Foreign Relations Committee members to voice support for CEDAW.
- Write letters to local papers explaining the importance of CEDAW and demanding its passage.
- Form coalitions with other organizations working for the ratification of CEDAW.

Other Countries:

- Find out if the government has reservations against CEDAW (legal objections to parts of the Convention) and pressure the government to withdraw them.
- Be active in monitoring compliance of CEDAW, including partnering with other monitoring organizations.
- NGOs are encouraged to write reports about their governments compliance with CEDAW. For more information on producing shadow reports, go to <<http://iwwaw.igc.org/shadow.htm>>.

International Women's Day

International Women's Day, March 8th, is observed around the world, not only by women's groups but also by the UN. 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 around the world have utilized International Women's Day as a rallying point for coordinated efforts 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 and the role of the UN in that pursuit.
- Sponsor an assembly at a local school on the history of women's struggles around the world.
- Hold a club recognition event for the Women's Opportunity Awards, Violet Richardson Award, and the new Making a Difference for Women Award honoree.
- Send a news release to local newspapers about International Women's Day and what the club will do to recognize the day.

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. In order to achieve these outcomes, 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:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

For the goals to be achieved, many countries will need substantial ongoing financial support. Without that support, the campaign will fail. For more information about the goals and the targets, visit the web site at www.un.org/millenniumgoals/.

Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

On October 31, 2000, the UN Security Council passed the historic 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 on all people involved in negotiating and implementing peace agreements to consider the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstructions. The Security Council also agreed to take into account gender considerations and the role of women in all of its missions.

In order to begin to make progress, the Security Council asked the Secretary-General to provide all UN member states 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. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom has launched a web site, PeaceWomen, to monitor compliance with Resolution 1325. To read the resolution and to monitor compliance visit www.peacewomen.com.

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 that focuses on women and girls from a UN organization.
- Support the passage and implementation of CEDAW by advocating or its ratification in the United States and implementation in other countries.
- Have club meetings about world issues, UN agencies, and/or federation and international projects.
- Plan an educational event to celebrate International Women's Day or any of the UN's special observance days.
- Advocate for the government's progress on achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
- Advocate for the UN's compliance with Security Council Resolution 1325.

UN Special Observances

March	8	International Women's Day
April	7	World Health Day
September	8	World Literacy Day
	21	International Day of Peace
October	16	World Food Day
	24	UN Day
November	20	Rights of the Child Day
	25	End Violence Against Women Day
December	1	World AIDS Day
	10	Human Rights Day