

“Dear SI Board Directors, dear Officers, dear Silent Observers,
I am honoured and humbled to take on the tasks of SI President, and I will do my utmost to meet the expectations that have been set in me. I am convinced that with good communications and with each other’s support, our organisation will successfully move in the direction laid down by Board of Directors. For those who do not know me very well, I am 62 years old, Dutch with an Indonesian background from my father’s side. I am married and have three sons with partners, one of whom is a Soroptimist and two others in the making. We have one granddaughter, two grandsons and our 4th grandchild is due at the end of October. My Soroptimist leadership career began as Union President of the Netherlands in 2003, then SIE Federation President from 2007 – 2009 and now SI President, I have been President of Women for Water Partnership since 2014. The two functions go hand in hand and are an added value to each respective organisation.

What would I like to achieve in the coming biennium? First and foremost, we have to implement the decisions the SI Board took during the last Board Meeting here in Rotterdam, especially the restructuring proposal which will commence in January 2018 with a skills-based board. As we have sold our premises in Cambridge, we must be prepared to move office before April 2018, which in itself is an enormous challenge. The archives at Cambridge HQ need sorting, which is another major task. However, considering that we are in the middle of preparations for the SI Centennial celebrations in 2021, the timing may in fact be good! 100 years of Soroptimist International is the achievement of all of us, and the SI Centennial Committee will continue to work on this event.

That brings me to my favourite subject – communication. SI launched a new website at the beginning of this year. Developing a new site takes time and is an ongoing process. As you all know, SI’s main focus is Advocacy and that is why communication is so important. SI has outstanding and competent UN representatives at six UN Centres. They have immense experience and vast amounts of information at their disposal which must be shared more widely. We must now strive to secure an SI UN Asian Pacific representative at the 7th UN Centre – the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok.

I attach great importance to clear and transparent communication, internally as well as externally to show the world what a great and wonderful organisation we are. Our strength is the worldwide membership: 75,000 professional women in 130 countries, each woman with her own expertise, knowledge and experience. Can you imagine how fantastic it would be if we were able to set up platforms of expertise in a worldwide **safe, protected and restricted** databank? Platforms available to members where they can find speakers, experts, UN representatives, support, information,

sponsors for conventions, projects, presentations and more. This network, dear Soroptimists, is our strength; it is a way to make us an invaluable asset to the world. This is a leap into the future, a way to strengthen and preserve Soroptimist International. We should use this goldmine: this means our members with their expertise and know-how.

The SI Future African Federation SIFAF is progressing very slowly, and there are still many unresolved issues. To inaugurate a new Federation, we need honest discussions between all parties. As the African countries have been working for many, many years to establish an African Federation, we must not allow the discussion to drag on. There will have to be negotiations between SIFAF – the applicant, and SI – the organisation they wish to join. And so, SI faces another challenge!

I am very enthusiastic about my President's Appeal 2017 – 2019 – Women, Water & Leadership. The culmination of my biennium will be the SI Convention 2019, in Kuala Lumpur. Listening to my own plans, I fear that two years will not be enough!

Nonetheless, I am looking forward to starting my biennium and will do my utmost to accomplish as much as possible. With your support, we will jointly draft a strategic plan for 2019 – 2023 to secure a positive future for SI!

I am delighted that Bev Becur (USA) has started as SI Director of Advocacy and Hafdís Karlsdóttir (Iceland) as SI Assistant Director of Advocacy. I thank Gerda Huisman (Netherlands) for taking on the task of SI Procedural Consultant, and I am grateful that Susanna Raccis (Italy) has agreed to serve as SI Treasurer for a further biennium. Together with appointees whom I hope will be approved later this meeting, this team will start from today – full of energy and enthusiasm.

Therefore, without further ado, I declare the 1st SI Board meeting 2017 – 2019 open." Mariet is now looking forward to an exciting end to her first month as SI President when she will be a keynote speaker at the Stockholm Water Week (27 August – 01 September.) Mariet will focus on the connections between UN Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 6 – Gender Equality and Clean Water and Sanitation. As Mariet prepares for this significant event in her calendar she says, "achieving a change of attitude in the world towards gender equality is key to ensuring the place of women as water experts at the decision making level"