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The Girl Child

by Christine Fulton, Maidstone Club, South East England Region, SIGBI

Immediate Past President Patsy Daniels introduced Patricia Flor, the Chairman of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. This distinguished German diplomat finished her education at Harvard with a Master of Public Administration degree. Patsy said “behind the words is a woman who genuinely care”.

Dr. Flor said that there was an essential role for civil society in the development of gender equality. The Fourth World Conference on Women could not have achieved what it did without the involvement of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), including Soroptimists. However it was now crucial that the implementation of the Platform for Action should be monitored. The girls of today are our future.

Dr. Flor divided her address into five parts:

- (a) The Human Rights that girls can claim. The right of gender equality was enshrined in the original framework of the United Nations. The position of the girl child was further clarified in the Declaration on Human Rights of the Child. In June 2000 there would be a conference at the UN to assess the progress on implementation of the Beijing Platform. She urged all her listeners to lobby their governments to ratify the points made in the platform.
- (b) The Human Rights that girls are deprived of. The sad reality showed in the male/female ratios in China, parts of South Asia and parts of Africa being higher than normal, indicating gender-related abortions and female infanticide. Girls tended to suffer more from malnutrition. Two-thirds of the world's illiterates are girls. Globally only about 10% of democratic representatives are women.
- (c) Ignorance of Human Rights. The roots of what we become lie in our childhood. Society at large shapes us all. Often it is the women who most uphold traditional beliefs about women's position. Schools and the media also reinforce prevailing views.
- (d) Steps to be taken now. It was essential to involve governments, local authorities, NGOs and communities in action to implement the Beijing Platform. She also hoped that the World Bank, as the biggest provider of aid, would put gender equality into its programmes for countries receiving aid.
- (e) Implementation of the review of the Platform for Action. Strategies were needed and partnership should be built. The role of fathers, men, and boys should be considered, and we needed to ensure that men adapted to new roles. Beijing +5 was time to measure progress and to reaffirm commitment.

In answer to questions, Dr. Flor said that the preparatory conference for Europe, Canada and the United States would be in Geneva in January 2000. She had proved to be a most fluent and persuasive speaker who, as Immediate Past President Patsy said, “is truly a global voice for women.”