

21st Soroptimist International Convention Kuala Lumpur 19-21 July 2019.

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia was the venue for the 21st Soroptimist International Convention from 19th to 21st July. The theme for the convention “Soroptimists Enable a Sustainable World; Global Connections, Empowered Women” invited members to address the issues that face our world, our work together for the future and our connection with Soroptimists who share our values.

The Opening Ceremony officiated by Her Majesty; The Queen of Malaysia was a colourful array of international flags and amazing national costumes. The roll call and ceremony emphasised what an international global organisation Soroptimist International is.

Christine Lamb OBE, author and chief foreign correspondent, Sunday Times of London was my favourite inspirational keynote speaker. Her speech related to Women & War. She survived being a passenger on Benazir Bhutto’s bus when it was blown up and she has reported on the women abducted by ISIS in Iraq. Her talk focused on the “women struggling to protect, feed and shelter their children while all around them is chaos”. Education, education, education is her hope for the future.

The plenary sessions throughout the conference focused on Gender Equality, Women leading in Technology and Innovation, She Matters: Healthcare and Lifetime Wellness and Climate: Our responsibility, Our Actions. It was empowering to hear women who excel in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics). Women like Professor Dr Jacqueline M. Cramer, former Minister for Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment in The Netherlands, who is passionate about sustainability asked us to “Think Globally and Act locally”. On the other hand, it was equally sad to hear how women still suffer as the victims of modern slavery. Marcela Suazo UN population Fund representative spoke about “a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled”.

The Irish delegates had a very enjoyable and educational Convention. As Dublin is the venue for the next International Conference, we were busy promoting Dublin 2023. We manned an information table at the

Exhibition Centre, and on the final day we presented a promotional audiovisual presentation on our beautiful city. We were welcomed to the Irish Embassy in Kuala Lumpur by Catherine Aylward our deputy ambassador to Malaysia, for refreshments and publicity shots.

Socially the convention was a wonderful success. On the opening night we had a Friendship Dinner and the theme was “Feel The Love”. The final night was a “Kaleidoscope of Cultures” at the Gala Dinner. The array of foods was amazing. The entertainment was exotic and colourful. The ceremonial change of insignia by Mariet Verhof-Cohen SI President, to Sharon Fisher SI President Elect and Yvonne Simpson SI Immediate Past President invigorated us all as we move forward.

After the Convention, some of the delegates joined the Sisterhood Tours, which were organised by SI Malaysia. Tess, Louise and I went on tour to Penang. We visited fabulous temples, exotic gold Buddas in the limestone caves at Ipoh, aromatic spice gardens and floating villages. This amazing tour was organised and led by two local Soroptimists Doris and Pheng. They gave us a wonderful experience and their generosity and friendship made it a once in a lifetime trip.

I arrived home on a high. Reinvigorated and energised as a woman, working to help women and girls. As Soroptimists we are part of a vibrant, worthwhile organisation, contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals, advocating for gender equality, and we represent the voice of women at the United Nations.

Ask me Why I’m a Soroptimist? The service, the friendships, the influence, we make a difference and a greater difference when we work together.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Darina Dolan.

President, Soroptimist International, Republic of Ireland.