

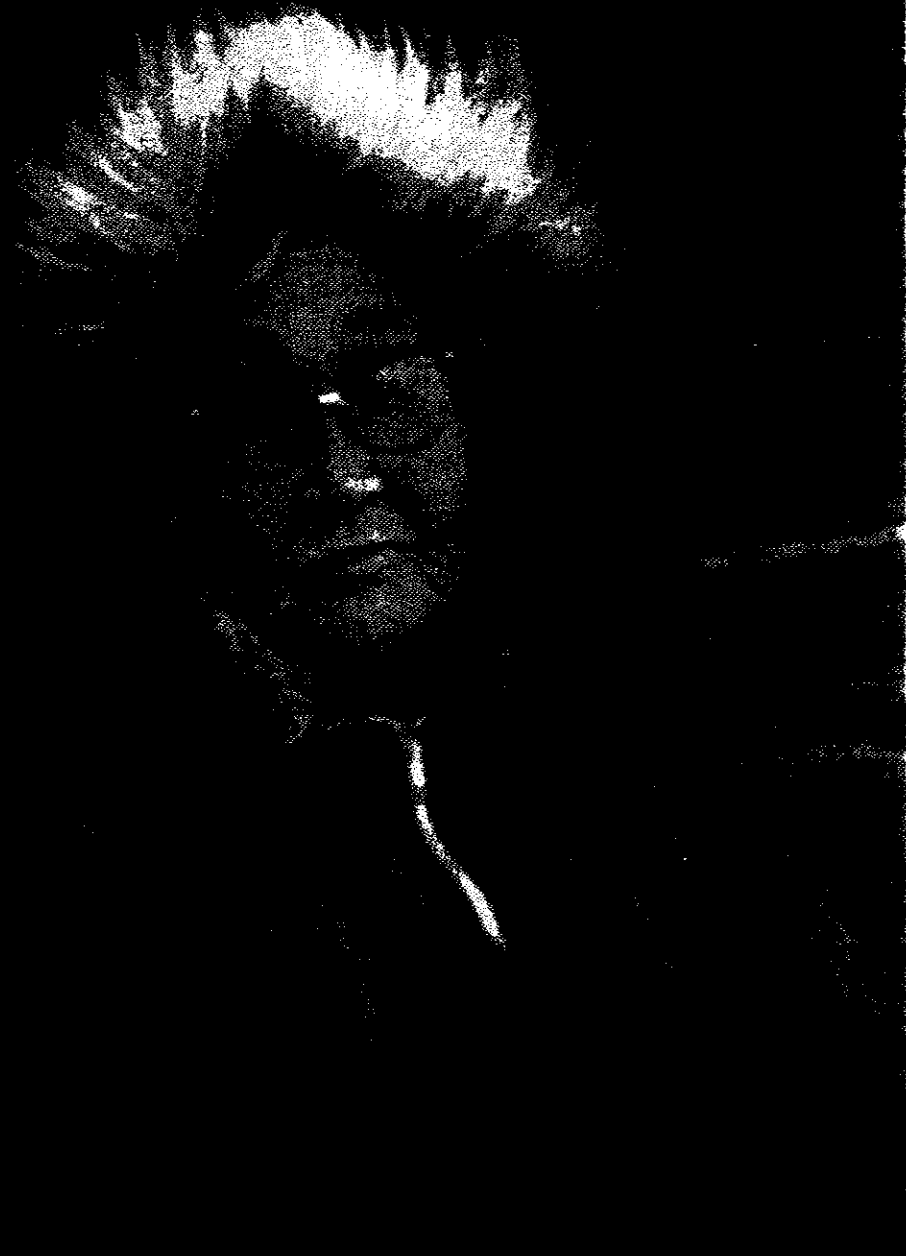
Soroptimist

In this issue . . .

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Soroptimist Traditions

Biennial Index 1996-1998



Indigenous People: Vanishing Cultures?

Making a difference for women
since 1921



First People

They call her Grandma Lupe. She is a slight woman, garbed in Huichola designs that dazzle in contrast to the drab adobe wall behind her. Grandma Lupe smiles, creases carving her broad face. They are coming, the other women of the Indigenous Cultural Society Tepehuanos, to Sinaloa, Mexico.

Here at a ceremonial meeting they will focus on the theme "Indigenous Women: Respect and Dignity." They will share in medicine dancing, conversation circles and sweat lodges, and will discuss the importance of preserving their cultures and sacred values. They will speak of their lives as first people and indigenous women.

by Marielena Zuniga

For Grandma Lupe this has special meaning. As a master artisan, spiritual guide and healer, she is keeping Huichola traditions and spirituality alive. Staccato words like Tate-Huirika-Iumara (grandmother) and Tate-Yulienaka (Mother Earth) punctuate her stories of sacred ceremonies honoring Mother Earth, about the need to remain in the harmonious circle of connection with the Creator.

This is the wisdom of the Huicholes and the legacy of their grandmothers. Grandma Lupe's mission is to teach that knowledge so that it is not forgotten. "It is an ancient history from long ago," she says, "and we the Huicholes continue to follow in its footsteps."

Whether the Huicholes of Mexico, the Ainu of Japan, the Inuit of the Arctic or the Yanomami of Brazil, they are the first people. They are sometimes called Fourth World people to distinguish them from the First (highly industrialized) World. But they are also called indigenous, Indians, aborigines, natives or tribal people. As yet, no universally agreed-upon name exists.

Nonetheless, they were the original inhabitants of their lands. And though some might stereotype them as primitive, their impact on civilization as we know it today was, and is, pervasive. They have influenced the languages we speak, the food we eat and the medicines we use. In essence, they are our lifelines to the past.

Sadly, some would relegate them there, a people of superstition and myth. But make no mistake that first people are very much alive today, reclaiming not only their cultures and identities, but their futures. From cities, towns, deserts, rain forests and islands, they decree: "We are here! See us. Hear us. We are not going to disappear."

In reality, indigenous cultures have never vanished, explains Dr. Leslie Korn, research director of the Center for World Indigenous Studies (CWIS) in Olympia, Washington, and also clinical director for the CWIS Center for Traditional Medicine. "They've often gone underground with their practices or stolen away for self-protection while other political formats came into place," she says, "but just scrape away that surface and the tradition and culture remain."

Today, as never before, the estimated 250 million indigenous people scattered in more than 70 countries—descendants of the original inhabitants of their lands—are stepping forward. They are organizing on local and global levels, and actively seeking self-determination and preservation of their cultural identities.

As a result, first people are at a place in history where they are strong, healthy and strengthening their capacities to deal with the onslaught of development and the legacy of colonialism, explains Korn. "We see among indigenous people, and in particular women, tremendous organizing and focusing of energies toward promoting and enhancing traditional ways of life that really form the cohesive structure of culture," she says.

Over the last 20 years indigenous people have organized, forming more than 1,000 groups worldwide. As part of the work of CWIS, for example, Korn supports traditional healing practices so that knowledge is not lost. Under her leadership, the Traditional Medicine Project seeks to increase understanding of the role women and traditional medicine play in the strengthening, stabilization and nurturing of human society.

An independent nonprofit organization, CWIS is dedicated to wider understanding and appreciation of the ideas and knowledge of indigenous people. The group's work focuses on domestic and international policy, research and education, and documentation and publication.

"When we think of the variety of indigenous people throughout the world, it's easy to forget that we all have an indigenous source," says Korn. "We may be separate and generations apart from it, but ultimately, we have a heritage of which we are a part. So part of the work we do [at CWIS] is to strengthen identities. If people can understand their own indigenous heritage, they can understand other people's as well."

In response to the need for international support for indigenous rights, the South and Meso American Indian Rights Center (SAIIC), now based in Oakland, California, was formed at a conference in Tiwanaku, Bolivia, in 1983. Since then, the organization has grown into a strong resource for the Indian people of the Americas.

The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) in Palmer, Alaska, an organization of indigenous people from North, Central and South America and the Pacific Basin, has been working for the protection of human rights, cultures and sacred

Taking Action

On December 21, 1993, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a program of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. This extensive program included suggested activities for the United Nations, the Centre for Human Rights, member states, and many other groups. Below are recommended activities for nongovernmental organizations and other interested parties.

- Cooperate with indigenous organizations, communities and people in the planning of activities for the Decade.
- Nongovernmental organizations working with indigenous people should involve indigenous people in their activities.
- Create radio and television centers in indigenous regions, when appropriate and in accordance with national legislation, to provide information on the problems and proposals of indigenous people, and to improve communication between indigenous communities.
- Promote indigenous cultures and their documentation by producing media and organizing various artistic and cultural events that enhance knowledge of and serve to develop those cultures.
- Involve different social and cultural groups in the activities planned for the Decade.

lands. Cultural Survival (CS) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has also been involved in defending cultural autonomy and human rights of indigenous people.

"It's important to stress that indigenous societies are modern alternatives, not primitive or backward," says Maria Tocco, managing director of CS. "They're constantly changing. The common misperception has been that indigenous groups have tried to be like Westerners and have failed. That's not true. They are aware that a modern world has existed for many centuries. They have just chosen to live different life-styles."

THE AINU IDENTITY

For the Ainu (pronounced "eye-noo"), preserving their cultural life-style and identity has been an ongoing struggle. The original inhabitants of Japan, they have a different cultural and racial background than the Japanese and, until recently, have not been recognized as indigenous by the Japanese government. Numbering around 24,000, most live on Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost main island.

"One of our challenges is to rewrite our history from the Ainu point of view," stated an Ainu woman from Hokkaido at the First Asian Indigenous Women's Conference held in Baguio City, the Philippines, in 1993. She was one of more than 200

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Caretakers of the Earth

of first people, we have lost the most precious source of our medicine, spiritual and sustaining source of life. As the first people use available resources without depleting them, promoting land conservation and biological diversity. For example, the Kayapo people of Brazil use seed selection and crop rotation to ensure re-growth and replenishment of the forest.

Industrialized nations clamor for more resources," says Dr. D. Sue Kim of the Center for World Indigenous Studies (CWIS) in Olympia, Washington. "Yet indigenous people are the most resource-rich people in the world."

As land has been taken away from first people, however, so has their guardianship of those resources. Despite existing treaties enacted to protect their territorial rights, indigenous people continue to wage struggles to claim lands that they view legally and historically as theirs.

In Canada, for instance, an agreement will give ownership of a new territory called Nunavut to some 40,000 Inuit (Eskimos prefer to be called) and other indigenous tribes in the Arctic by the year 2000.

In the United States, the Western Shoshone are pressing claims to several million acres taken from them by an act of Congress in 1863, while in 1990 some 500,000 Ecuadorians successfully demonstrated for legal title to more than 2.5 million acres of Amazon land.

Acknowledging indigenous people as "the more authentic and convincing custodians of environmental resources," the United Nations General Assembly created the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) and NGOs with consultative status to the UN's Economic and Social Council, to be one of the first NGOs in history to address a plenary session. The assembly held last year was called to review the achievements and failures of the five years that have elapsed since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

There, Andrea Carmen, IITC executive director, stated: "The natural world is not a commodity. The natural world, the Earth, is our Mother who provides all that we eat, drink, breathe and use in our daily lives. The diverse forms of life on this Earth depend upon us to protect their survival... a sacred web of life that can not be jeopardized without risk to... our own human existence." —M.Z.



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indigenous women from 19 countries, including the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, Pakistan and Tibet, attending the conference that focused on maintaining culture, strength and dignity. "Another struggle is to develop our cultural heritage, to fight against discrimination and to restore the Ainu language," she declared.

Through these struggles, the Ainu have become well-organized, advancing their interests in the international arena, says Dr. Rudolph Ryser, cofounder and chairman of the board of CWIS. "This is giving rise to subtle changes and shifts in the Japanese government's position. Ainu organizations are now getting more support to advance their cultural programs in the northern part of Japan, which is where most of the original Ainu came from."

Those changes have resulted in a new law passed last year to acknowledge the existence of the Ainu. The legislation describes its purpose as "an attempt to realize a society that respects the dignity of the Ainu as a distinct race by promoting Ainu culture and spreading information about Ainu traditions."

For the Ainu this may not be enough, and indeed for many indigenous people the political wheels turn slowly. Still, political groups around the world are making efforts. To raise public awareness of the plight of indigenous people, the United Nations (UN) proclaimed 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, naming Rigoberta Menchu Tum its Goodwill Ambassador.

The Quiche activist from Guatemala, winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize, told the Commission on Human Rights that the year must mean that "the cultural, material and social rights of indigenous people can no longer be left on hold." Two years later, the General Assembly designated 1995-2004 as the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

The UN began its first formal work on the status of indigenous people in 1982 with the establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, open to all representatives of indigenous people, their communities and organizations.

"The first meetings had five representatives," says Andrea Carmen, executive director of IITC. "But in the last few years there have been 800 representatives from all over the world. That message of standing firm together to uphold and recognize indigenous rights on an international level has had a growing impact on indigenous people around the world."

At its 1996 session, the Working Group decided to consider specific themes under its agenda item "review of developments," and last year focused on environment, land and sustainable development. In July 1997, the group's 16th session highlighted education and language.

But perhaps the Working Group's most important achievement to date has been the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people. If adopted, the declaration, which is to be submitted through the Commission on Human Rights to the General Assembly, will acknowledge the basic rights of indigenous people, among them: to be free and equal to all other individuals; self-determination; lands, territories and resources rights; and to maintain their distinct identities and characteristics.

DAUGHTERS OF MOTHER EARTH

Fortunately, many indigenous women never lost sight of their identities. In indigenous cultures, they are the ones who transmit values and spirituality to other generations and retain the customs, says Laura Soriano, executive director of SAIIC. "They have much to do with the struggles of their people. And they give back what they've learned to keep their culture going," she says.



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Indigenous people, such as these from Canada, have organized to revive and promote traditional ways of life in order to preserve their cultures.

To that end, the Indigenous Women's Network (IWN) in Lake Elmo, Minnesota, empowers indigenous women, their families, communities and nations within the Americas and the Pacific Basin. The group educates and advocates for the revitalization of indigenous languages and cultures; protection of religious and cultural practices; land recovery; and environmental practices.

"In order to heal our families, communities and nations, and before working on global issues, we must first start with ourselves," says Marsha Gomez, founding member of IWN. "And when I say healing, this is of the mind, body and spirit approach."

The artist and activist also directs IWN's Alma de Mujer (Soul of the Woman) retreat center in Austin, Texas, a place of networking and resources for indigenous people. There, and in other locations, she conducts intensive internships with young native women about plants and healing, and offers workshops on traditional pottery practices of Southeastern tribes.

Like Gomez, many women are stepping forward in support of their people. In 1986 in northeastern Brazil, for example, Eliane Potiguara created Grupo Mulher—Educacao (GRUMIN). GRUMIN mobilizes indigenous women; holds conferences and seminars; organizes vocational training to raise indigenous women's awareness; and helps them to take control of their lives.

In Arequipa in southern Peru, Celina del Carpio of the National University of San Augustin actively helps improve the rights of indigenous women in her community. And in La Paz, Bolivia, the Aymara Women's Development Center (CDIMA) helps the Aymara communities, especially women and young

Indigenous People in SIA Countries

Arctic

Inuit (Esquimaux) in Alaska and Canada; Aleut in Alaska

Argentina

Guaraní, Kolla, Mapuche, Mestizo, Toba

Bolivia

Aymara, Ayoreo, Chiquitano, Chiriguano, Guarani, Mestizo, Quechua

Brazil

Arawá, Araweté, Asurini, Gavião, Kayapo, Krenak-Akroá, Makuxá, Nambikwara, Parakana, Patxó, Ha-Ha-Ha, Iukano, Txukunamae, Waimiri, Atroari, Xavante, Yanomami

Central Canada

Cree, Metis, Chipewyan, Blackfoot, Dene

Eastern Canada

Inuit, Cree, including James Bay Cree

Canada/United States Border

Micmac; the Six Nation Confederacy or Haudenosaunee, comprising Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Tuscarora

Chile

Aymara, Mapuche

Costa Rica

Boruca, Bribri, Guatuso

Guam

Kanaky, Tahitians, Chamorros

Japan

Ainu

Mexico

Mixe, Tarahumara, Yaqui, Lacandon, Yucatec, Huichol, Nahuatl, Zapotec

Panama

Choco, Embera, Guaymí, Kuna

Paraguay

Ache, Ayoreo, Guaraní, Toba-Maskoy

Peru

Aguaruna, Amarakaeri, Ashaninka, Aymara, Matsigenka, Quechua, Yagua

Philippines

Bangsa Moro, Bontoc, Hanunoo Ibaloy, Ifugao, Isneg, Kalinga, Kankana

Puerto Rico

Some call themselves "Borinquenos" after their Taino-Arawak ancestors

Taiwan

Only 350,000 of islanders are indigenous of Malayo-Polynesian origin

United States

Northwestern: Nez Percé
Southwestern: Navajo, Ute, Diné, Pueblo, including Hopi, Keres, Zuni
Plains States: Crow, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Pawnee, Comanche, Oglala Sioux, Shoshone

Venezuela

Bani, Baranare, Parao, Wayana (Guayana), Yanomami, Yanena

*List is not inclusive



While indigenous people are often thought of as primitive, many are aware of the "modern" world's amenities and have made a conscious choice to live as their ancestors did. Photograph courtesy of the South and Meso American Indian Rights Center.

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people, by teaching traditional music and dance classes, as well as stories of their Aymara ancestors.

"We organized ourselves for the purpose of educating ourselves and empowering ourselves to defend our culture and our language," says Alicia Canaviri, general coordinator. "Our language is used as the means to achieve our goals of defending the thoughts and ideas of our people."

Whether talking about families or food preparation or organizing leadership in the communities in which they work, women are the glue, the leaders, says Korn of CWIS. "And there certainly is a sense of sanctity of life and connection with all of life," she says.

That connection was stated clearly at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, where indigenous women affirmed themselves daughters of Mother Earth. As part of the "1995 Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women," they declared that they would "continue to protect, transmit and develop their cosmo-vision, science, technologies, arts and cultures ... which are in harmony with the natural laws of Mother Earth."

FOOTSTEPS TO THE FUTURE


As first people claim their rights to determine their lives, they do not want to be seen as barriers to economic and technical progress. Nor do they want to be overly romanticized or stereotyped. And even though there have been successes, there is still much work ahead, says Ingrid Washinawatok.

Director of the Fund of the Four Directions in New York City and cochair of IWN, Washinawatok has an extensive background in working with indigenous people and the UN.

In 1994, she served as chairperson of the NGO Committee on the International Decade. At that NGO conference she stated, "We must unlock the silence of our people. Unlock the silence and let us speak to the world."

It would seem that those voices are finally being heard. And even though oppression still continues, Carmen of IITC feels that something is happening, spiritually and politically, regarding the role of indigenous people.

"Governments and countries are now seeking us out for our input," she says. "There's been enormous change in the last five years in terms of the international work and the recognition and importance of the contributions of indigenous people. We are no longer a back-burner issue."

That request for recognition resounded throughout the world in 1992 in Brazil. There, at the first World Conference of Indigenous People, the more than 400 indigenous leaders worldwide declared their inherent rights to self-determination; to decide their own form of government; to raise and educate their children; and to preserve their cultural identity. There they echoed the plea of their peoples—the prayer of Grandma Lupe—"to walk to the future in the footprints of our ancestors." 

Marielena Zuniga is a Langhorne, PA-based free-lance writer. She is a frequent contributor to The Soroptimist of the Americas magazine.

Each year, hundreds of Soroptimists submit entries to SIA's Soroptimists Celebrating Success awards program. The magazine highlights the year's winners in the program area that corresponds to the feature article. This column also includes, when possible, information about club activities directly related to the feature article.

For More Information

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Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
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International Indian Treaty Council

456 North Alaska St.
Palmer, Alaska 99645
(907) 745-4482

Indigenous Women's Network

P.O. Box 174
Lake Elmo, Minnesota 55042
(605) 393-1053

Original Women's Network

316-181 Higgins Ave.
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 3G1
Canada
(204) 942-2711

Recommended Reading

*Indigenous Peoples
in International Law*

by S. James Anaya
(Oxford University Press, 1996)

Voice of Indigenous Peoples

by Alexander Ewan (ed.), Rigoberta
Menchu, and Boutros Boutros-Ghali
(Clear Light Publications, 1994)

*Unjust Relations: Aboriginal Rights
in Canadian Courts*

by Peter Kulchyski (ed.)
and the Canada Supreme Court
(Oxford University Press, 1994)

Aboriginal Peoples:

Toward Self-Government

edited by Marie Leger
(Black Rose Books, Ltd., 1994)

*State of the Peoples: A Global
Human Report on Societies in Danger*

by Marc S. Miller
and Robert F. Kennedy
(Beacon Press, 1993)

SOROPTIMISTS CELEBRATING SUCCESS!

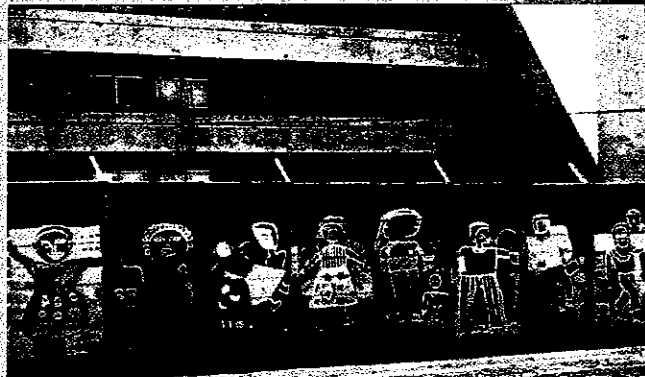
**FIRST PLACE:
INTERNATIONAL
GOODWILL AND
UNDERSTANDING
SI/CHICO,
CALIFORNIA**

SI/Chico created "Steps Without Fear," a project to raise local awareness of and funds for the international campaign to ban landmines. The club organized itself into teams according to members' interests and contacts, and reached approximately 32 schools; 169 churches; all of the local, state and federal politicians; and various local service organizations, businesses and media. The churches were asked to read a special prayer for the banning of landmines, which most congregations heard in December 1996. Local media ran public service announcements about "Steps Without Fear," and a local radio show aired a discussion with members of SI/Chico about landmine issues and Soroptimist involvement. More than 1,200 area schoolchildren wrote messages of support and friendship to those most directly affected by landmines.

The club received more than \$1,000 in cash contributions, which was presented to past SI President Patsy Daniels, who sent it to the Mines Advisory Group. In addition, the club presented Patsy with a project scrapbook and the children's messages. SI/Chico also drafted a "Steps Without Fear" project plan and resource guide for use by other clubs. Congratulations to SI/Chico for raising community awareness about the international problem of landmines and Soroptimist involvement with the campaign.

**SECOND PLACE
SI/SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**

SI/São Paulo teamed with its Friendship Link, SI/Port Elizabeth, South Africa, to create an educational art program about family life. Upon receiving SI/São Paulo's proposal to collaborate on such a



SI/São Paulo displayed these paintings of family life created by children in South Africa.

project, SI/Port Elizabeth held a children's art workshop in which participants painted portraits of their families. Their work was displayed in a local art gallery, and the children also painted a mural in one of their city's depressed areas. The children's artwork was then sent to SI/São Paulo, where Soroptimists held an exhibition and contest, sending prizes to the winners in SI/Port Elizabeth. Members of SI/São Paulo then assembled an exhibition of old family photos, which were displayed side by side with the Port Elizabeth paintings to educate the public about the similarities and differences between family life in Brazil and South Africa.

**THIRD PLACE
SI/ANGELES CITY, PHILIPPINES**

SI/Angeles City assists Operation Rainbow Australia Limited during its annual medical mission to the Philippines. Operation Rainbow, a volunteer medical program, sends a 16-person team composed of surgeons, anesthesiologists and nurses from Australia and the United States to provide reconstructive surgery to Philippine children with cleft lips or palates. Working 12 hours a day, the team sees more than 150 patients during its week in the Philippines. During this time, SI/Angeles City members serve as assistants and interpreters, and local Ventana Club members also lend a hand.