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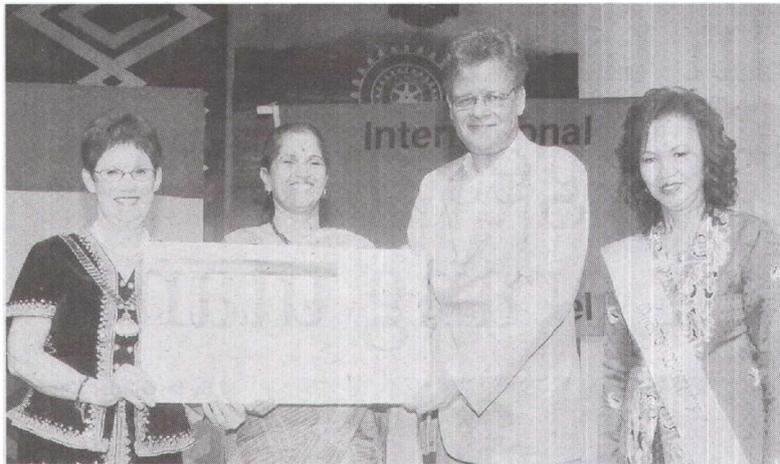
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Suzanne Nielsen (left), District 330 president Iah Ragunathan and Datuk Nancy Ho (right) at the presentation of £155,000 to Unicef executive director Steen M. Andersen to be used for girls' education in Madagascar at the convention yesterday.

■ By Annie Freeda Cruz

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KUALA LUMPUR: Wives of Rotarians have for years been doing their utmost to help where needed.

For the first time, more than 800 of them from 34 countries gathered recently at the 14th International Inner Wheel (IIW) Convention in Kota Kinabalu, themed "Realise your visions and make a difference" to share their thoughts, skills, knowledge and experience.

The IIW is the world's largest women's service organisation with the objectives of promoting true friendship, encouraging the ideals of personal service and fostering international understanding.

Convention coordinator and former president of the Inner Wheel Club of Kota Kinabalu Datuk Nancy Ho said the city won the bid to host the event after beating South Africa, India, Ireland, Great Britain and France.

"We wanted to host the convention in Asia for the first time as we want women in this region to gain an insight into what others do in their countries to help, be it in the field of vocation, literacy programmes, health camps, support for orphans, disabled, children, battered women or HIV/AIDS victims. It was an

ideal opportunity to share knowledge, skills and experience," Ho said yesterday.

There are 500 Malaysians and Singaporean women in Inner Wheel district 330. There are 100,000 women in Inner Wheel from 97 countries and about 3,804 clubs throughout 166 geographical districts with the headquarters in Sale, Cheshire, United Kingdom.

It enjoyed United Nations status to sit on several commissions such as Committee on the Rights of the Family, the Human Rights Council, the Committee on the Status of Women, the Committee on Ageing and the Committee on Narcotic Drugs.

The convention, opened by Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman and IIW president Suzanne Nielsen, is held every three years, said Ho, who will be its International Board director from July 1.

A welcome reception was hosted by city mayor Datuk Ilyas Ibrahim while Tourism, Culture and Environment

minister Datuk Masidi Manjun hosted the hospitality evening dinner.

Foreign Minister Datuk Anifah Aman attended the gala night organised for the delegates.

Inner Wheel began on Jan 10, 1924, when Mrs Margarette Golding presided over a club formed of Rotarian wives. The roots from which

IIW has grown were established in 1934 when the Association of Inner Wheel Clubs in Great Britain and Ireland was formed. In the 1930s, clubs were formed in Australia, New Zealand and Norway.

Today, IIW links together members in different parts of the world including Europe, Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Americas.