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Canadian at the helm of the world's premiere doula association

Canadian Susan Martensen becomes DONA International president Oct. 1. DONA International is the world's leading association of doulas—professionals who provide advocacy and emotional, physical, and informational support to women and childbearing families before and during birth, and during the postpartum period.

A practicing birth and postpartum doula herself, Martensen, of Ottawa, is taking the helm of the oldest and largest association of doulas at a time when the doula profession and the demand for doula support are growing globally. DONA International, called Doulas of North America from its founding in 1992 until just over a year ago, now has more than 5,500 in 20 countries across the globe.

“We’re now moving into the international arena and my role will be to lead us in defining what that means,” says Martensen. “I know that we must not just take our North American model out to the world; we must focus on what is universal about birth and the transition to parenthood. We must use the knowledge of our local members to provide culturally sensitive support to mothers and families everywhere.”

DONA International’s primary role is supporting doulas wherever they are, says Martensen. “Our first order of business during my tenure will be to focus on serving our members. We need to continue to enhance our member services to make sure we meet our members needs as we continue to grow.”

During her two-year term, Martensen will serve as the leading spokesperson for DONA International. She frequently addresses numerous timely controversies related to birth and the postpartum period, including the rising rate of Cesareans, marketing of formula to new mothers, postpartum depression and need for more support for new parents.

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New DONA International president/add 1

Martensen is the right person at the right time, says former president Ann Grauer of Milwaukee. "Susan is an international woman leading an international organization. She has lived and traveled around the globe and, consequently, brings a uniquely international perspective to her role."

Martensen has spent most of her life immersed in a multi-cultural environment. She grew up in Europe and the Far East, moving frequently because her father was in England's Royal Air Force. Before becoming a doula, she worked as a global recruiter for the hospitality industry, placing people in positions all around the world.

"I'm fortunate to have had the exposure to multiple cultures," says Martensen. "I appreciate all I have learned from diverse people I have encountered. That's why the international aspect of DONA International is so important to me."

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