



International Women's Day 2011



March 8th, 2011 is the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day (IWD). This is a global day celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future.

The theme chosen by the United Nations for International Women's Day (IWD) 2010 is *Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress for All*. As these words suggest, achieving equality for women and girls involves not only establishing a strong foundation of legal rights but also the social, economic, political and educational openings that give substance to those rights.



History of IWD

The first International Women's Day event was run in 1911. IWD has been observed since the early 1900's which was a time of great expansion and turbulence in the industrialized world that saw booming population growth and the rise of radical ideologies.

Suffragettes campaigned for women's right to vote. The word 'Suffragette' is derived from the word "suffrage" meaning the right to vote. International Women's Day honours the work of the Suffragettes, celebrates women's success, and reminds of inequities still to be redressed.

1908

Great unrest and critical debate was occurring amongst women. Women's oppression and inequality was spurring women to become more vocal and active in campaigning for change. Then in 1908, 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding shorter hours, better pay and voting rights.

1909

In accordance with a declaration by the Socialist Party of America, the first National Woman's Day (NWD) was observed across the United States on 28 February. Women continued to celebrate NWD on the last Sunday of February until 1913.

1910

In 1910 a second International Conference of Working Women was held in Copenhagen. A woman named a [Clara Zetkin](#) (Leader of the 'Women's Office' for the Social Democratic Party in Germany) tabled the idea of an International Women's Day. She proposed that every year in every country there should be a celebration on the same day - a *Women's Day* - to press for their demands.

1911

Following the decision agreed at Copenhagen in 1911, International Women's Day (IWD) was honoured the [first time](#) in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland on 19 March. More than one million women and men attended IWD rallies campaigning for women's rights to work, vote, be trained, to hold public office and end discrimination. However less than a week later on 25 March, the tragic 'Triangle Fire' in New York City took the lives of more than 140 working women, most of them Italian and Jewish immigrants. This disastrous event drew significant attention to working conditions and labour legislation in the United States that became a focus of subsequent International Women's Day events. 1911 also saw women's ['Bread and Roses'](#) campaign.

1913-1914

On the eve of World War I campaigning for peace, Russian women observed their first International Women's Day on the last Sunday in February 1913. In 1913 following discussions, International Women's Day was transferred to 8 March and this day has remained the global date for International Women's Day ever since. In 1914 further women across Europe held rallies to campaign against the war and to express women's solidarity.

1917

On the last Sunday of February, Russian women began a strike for "bread and peace" in response to the death over 2 million Russian soldiers in war. Opposed by political leaders the women continued to strike until four days later the Czar was forced to abdicate and the provisional Government granted women the right to vote. The date the women's strike commenced was Sunday 23 February on the Julian calendar then in use in Russia. This day on the Gregorian calendar in use elsewhere was 8 March.

1918 – 1999

Since its birth in the socialist movement, International Women's Day has grown to become a global day of recognition and celebration across developed and developing countries. For many years the United Nations has held an annual IWD conference to coordinate international efforts for women's rights and participation in social, political and economic processes. 1975 was designated as '*International Women's Year*' by the United Nations. Women's organizations and governments around the world have also observed IWD annually on 8 March by holding large-scale events that honour women's advancement and while diligently reminding of the continued vigilance and action required to ensure that women's equality is gained and maintained in all aspects of life.

2000 and beyond

IWD is now an official holiday in Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, China (for women only), Cuba, Georgia, Guinea-Bissau, Eritrea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Madagascar (for women only), Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal (for women only), Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Zambia. The tradition sees men honouring their mothers, wives, girlfriends, colleagues, etc with flowers and small gifts. In some countries IWD has the equivalent status of Mother's Day where children give small presents to their mothers and grandmothers.



The new millennium has witnessed a significant change and attitudinal shift in both women's and society's thoughts about women's equality and emancipation. Many from a younger

generation feel that 'all the battles have been won for women' while many feminists from the 1970's know only too well the longevity and ingrained complexity of patriarchy. With more women in the boardroom, greater equality in legislative rights, and an increased critical mass of women's visibility as impressive role models in every aspect of life, one could think that women have gained true equality. The unfortunate fact is that women are still not paid equally to that of their male counterparts, women still are not present in equal numbers in business or politics, and globally women's education, health and the violence against them is worse than that of men.

However, great improvements have been made. We do have female astronauts and prime ministers, school girls are welcomed into university, women can work and have a family, women have real choices. The tone and nature of IWD has, for the past few years, moved from being a reminder about the negatives to a celebration of the positives.



Annually on 8 March, thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate achievements. A global web of rich and diverse local activity connects women from all around the world ranging from political rallies, business conferences, government activities and networking events through to local women's craft markets, theatric performances, fashion parades and more.

So make a difference, think globally and act locally!! Make everyday International Women's Day. Do your bit to ensure that the future for girls is bright, equal, safe and rewarding.

Useful Links

The following websites are some helpful sources of information on International Women's Day, its history and the struggle for gender equality in Canada and around the world:

- United Nations Cyber School Bus:
www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/womensday/index.asp
- Ontario Women's Directorate: International Women's Day – Resources and Links:
www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/resources/information/dates/iwd.shtml
- Canadian Labour Congress:
www.canadianlabour.ca/action-center/womens-economic-equality/fact-sheets
- Women Watch: www.un.org/womenwatch
- UNIFEM: www.unifem.org
- UNITE: www.un.org/en/women/endviolence
- Plan Canada: www.becauseiamagirl.ca/learn/learn