

What is International Women's Day/Week?

Every year on March 8, millions of women and men around the world celebrate *International Women's Day*. This day is an ideal opportunity to reflect the progress made to advance women's equality, to assess the challenges facing women in contemporary society and to look at ways to improve life conditions, to demand their rights and, of course, to celebrate the gains made.

Women on all continents often divided by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences come together to celebrate *International Women's Day*. It is a celebration of ordinary women as makers of history. Rallies, marches, fairs, receptions, shows, films and debates are held around the world to celebrate the achievements for women's equality.

When did it start?

Toward the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century, a movement of women struggling for better working conditions and recognition of their fundamental rights, including the right to vote, emerged in North America and Europe.

Notwithstanding differing views as to its origin, a number of historians believe that *International Women's Day* emanates from labour strikes of female textile workers on March 8, in both 1857 and 1908, to protest against poor working conditions in New York City. However, the first official reference to *International Women's Day* can be traced to a demonstration for women's suffrage organized by the National Association of Socialist Women. Referred to as "*Women's Day*", the demonstration took place on February 28, 1909 and was celebrated annually in the United States on the last Sunday in February until 1913.

Inspired by the *American Women's Day*, at the Second International conference of Socialist Women held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1910, the German socialist leader, Clara Zetiken, presented a resolution calling for the designation of an *International Women's Day* to recognize women's struggles around the world, including the fight for universal suffrage. The resolution was passed unanimously by more than 100 delegates representing 17 countries. The first *International Women's Day* was celebrated on March 19 the next year in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. Following that, it was celebrated in other parts of the world in February or March and sporadically in North America until the end of the 1960s.

At the end of the 1960s, interest in *International Women's Day* was revived with the birth of the women's liberation movement. In 1977, the United Nations adopted a resolution inviting countries to dedicate one day to celebrate the rights of women and international peace. March 8 became the date of recognition in many countries. Over the course of the years, the celebrations grew and often stretched over a week, with March 8 being the highlight. This year in Canada, *International Women's Week* is March 6 to 12.