

International Women's Day

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Tomorrow is a significant day for over 50% of the population of Canada. Why? Because it is a day focussed exclusively on the importance of recognizing women's rights, and women's issues, not just here at home, but around the world. It is a day for us to raise awareness of the plight of women who are not recognized as equal partners in their own homes, or in their countries of origin. A day for us to mourn those lost to intimate partner and gender-based violence and a day for us to advocate for those who don't have dominion over their own bodies when it comes to reproductive rights. This latter truth hits a little too close to home when we consider what is happening just to the south of us. However, International Women's Day (IWD) is also a day for us to celebrate.

IWD is an opportunity to celebrate and honour the achievements of the women in our local communities and more broadly, in the world around us, while also recommitting to keeping up the pressure on our social, political, economic and health care systems to continue to focus on equity. It's not just about ensuring there are women at the table, but about also ensuring systems are in place that ensure belonging and inclusion and, therefore, success. IWD is a chance for women to lift each other up and to ensure a continued lens is laser focussed on future progress. In fact, this year's IWD theme is: "Invest in women, Accelerate Progress." The UN has set a lofty goal of achieving gender equality by 2030. It really shouldn't be seen as "lofty" and in a perfect world it wouldn't be a goal at all because we'd already have it. What's so alarming is that also according to the UN, we are nowhere near achieving it.

Our current economic systems disproportionately impact women and children. We are more likely to live below the poverty line, to lack access to social services, to suffer from harmful or dismissive health care practices and gender-based violence. The pandemic exacerbated every single one of these issues, holding a magnifying glass up for the whole world to see what most women already know: that many of us are struggling, even in "enlightened" economic and political systems where some legal and constitutional protections exist. If we're struggling here, how do we accelerate progress elsewhere when even the UN says: "Gender equality remains the greatest human rights challenge."

As already stated, we do it by celebrating IWD. We highlight and bring attention to the issues that directly impact women with a view to continuing the relentless push forward for equality. We do it by celebrating the army of women who fight the systems put in place to hold us down. We do it by lifting each other up, every day and celebrating not only the big wins like when Trudeau was the first Canadian Prime Minister to create a cabinet composed equally of both men and women, but also by celebrating the little wins like when your daughter playing little league hockey can see herself represented in the big leagues as she watches members of the PWHL take to the ice. We do it by celebrating the courage, strength and resilience of young adults like Greta Thunberg who single-handedly led a revolution of sorts, finally calling the world's attention to the climate crisis, or when Autumn Peltier, Anishinaabe water-rights advocate, fights on in the quest for clean drinking water for Indigenous communities.

We celebrate because the world my grandmother and mother were raised in wasn't as progressive as the one my mother raised me in. At least the world I'm raising my daughter in is a little more progressive than when I was a young adult. So, more than anything, we celebrate IWD because the world we want our daughters to inherit HAS to be better than the one we did, and to make that a reality WE must continue to fight, to advocate for change, to be fearless leaders, to tackle aggression whether micro or macro, to face down sexual harassment and to continue to call out men who continue to refuse us a seat at the table. We celebrate because if we don't, those who would deny us our basic human rights will not only continue to do so, but feel emboldened by our silence. There are still enough people and systems in place attempting to silence our voices. Therefore, it's incumbent upon each and every one of us to make some noise. To assume the collective mantle of responsibility bestowed upon us by previous generations, like those earliest suffragettes who fought for women to be recognized as persons and for the right to vote. There is still much work to be done but by also celebrating International Women's Day together, we'll continue to have an impact on creating a world that our daughters and granddaughters deserve to live in.