

Do we have something to celebrate on International Women's Day?

Published: 06/03/2015 - 08:22



[\[Spanish Feminist/Flickr\]](#)

We all have to continue our efforts to encourage a real political will to increase and enforce women's rights, writes Olalla Michelena, ahead of International Women's Day.

Olalla Michelena is secretary-general of the European Delegation of Make Mothers Matter (MMM).

8 March is International Women's Day and this year we are also celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Gender conference where many commitments to advance women's rights were agreed upon.

The origins of this day can be found in the struggle of women garment workers in New York City who on 1908 went on strike for thirteen long winter weeks and in the end they won. Inspired by this, the German socialist leader Clara Zetkin proposed at a 1910 gathering of socialist women that 8 March be celebrated as International Women's Day, and that the fight to get women the right to vote should be promoted on that day.

In some countries and some areas there has been progress regarding these commitments from Beijing such as maternal health due to a 45% reduction of mortality. But still there are 800 women who die every day from preventable causes. In terms of political presence, the number of women in European Parliament has almost doubled. However, we are still underrepresented with only 22% of them having a seat in the Parliament.

Only half of the women in the world are in paid employment (a 40% increase) but they earn 10-30% less than men for the same work.

In addition, violence against women is increasing in some countries, and one women out of three experience physical or sexual violence.

So do you think we have something to celebrate?

We think that we do. But also, we all have to continue our efforts to encourage a real political will to increase and enforce women's rights.

In particular, we think it is essential to promote the role of mothers in their families and their valuable contribution to society. Mothers' situations have a direct impact on their children. Improving their lives improves their children's lives, which is the future of our society. The last Innocenti report showed child poverty has increased in many countries in Europe and the EU. To achieve women's equal rights for a better future for all, we need every men and women of all ages to participate.

The UN #Heforshe campaign promoted by actress Emma Watson recognises that we will not achieve gender equality if men are not on board. Men also have a stake in this issue. We all have. Let's start with fathers and all men and boys who understand that it is crucial to support their daughters, spouses, sisters and mothers. A new parallel campaign has been launched on social media called #Sheforhe, redefining feminism.

Let's all work together to improve all women's rights and to create the conditions that are needed for them to best play their role in the family, workplace and society.

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