

International Women's Day 2010

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While the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the awakening of feminism, the birth of the women's rights campaign with some success and the laying of the groundwork for further progress, the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be - must be - the era when prejudice, violence and discrimination against women and girls finally ends.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century for women ended on a positive, ambitious and determined note when, in the aftermath of the September 2000 Millennium Summit, gender issues were integrated into many of the subsequent Millennium Development Goals.

This year, the focus is on Goal 5, "*Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio*".

It is judged to be the least likely to be achieved and that should make us all determined that immediate global action is taken to work towards its achievement. Every day, 1500 women around the world die in childbirth or pregnancy related complications and for every woman who dies, 20 experience serious complications.

These appalling statistics should shame us all. From shame comes anger; from anger must come a wholehearted and unanimous commitment to reach that goal and even exceed it.

That more girls aged 15 to 19 worldwide die during childbirth or from pregnancy related complications than any other cause is an international disgrace. That fact alone should be a wake-up call for immediate action.

International Women's Day, observed on March 8, celebrates the economic, political and social achievements of woman past, present and future; but while it is about women, it is not just for women.

If we are to achieve those Millennium Goals- ending violence against women, empowering women and achieving gender equality and, critically, improving maternal health - then men have to be partners in that campaign.

The UN General Assembly declared 1975 as the International Women's Year and the first World Conference on Women declared 1976 -1985 the UN Decade for Women.

In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women - often referred to as the International Bill of Rights for Women - and in 1985, a world conference to review the UN Decade for Women declared all issues to be women's issues.

The 1995 world conference asserted women's rights as human rights and the ground was laid for the proclamation of the Millennium Goals agenda in 2000.

We now have the policy and philosophical framework to make progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. All we need is the will and the commitment.

March 8 is the day when we celebrate success, reflect upon progress and resolve to work for further advances for women world-wide.