



THE HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

IWD celebrates its 100th anniversary this year. 100 years of activism, lobbying and challenges marks the importance of IWD to the lives of all women across the world. IWD has its origins in the work and activism of ordinary women in the United States, Europe and Russia fighting for the right to vote. The first National Women's Day was held in America on February 28th 2009. In 2010 at the Socialist women's gathering in Copenhagen the idea of an international day was first raised with over 100 women from 17 countries unanimously supporting the idea.

The very first International Women's Day was celebrated in Germany, Austria, and Denmark, with some other European countries, in 2011 on March 19th. A tragic fire less than a week later in New York saw 140 working women die, mostly Jewish and Italian immigrants in the famous Triangle Fire in the middle of New York city. In subsequent International women's Day events this tragedy was remembered and the fight to improve women's working conditions became an intrinsic part of international activism around IWD.

In 1917 with 2 million Russian soldiers dead in the war, Russian women again chose the last Sunday in February to strike for "bread and peace". Political leaders opposed the timing of the strike, but the women went on anyway. The rest is history: Four days later the Czar was forced to abdicate and the provisional Government granted women the right to vote. That historic Sunday fell on 23 February on the Julian calendar then in use in Russia, but on 8 March on the Gregorian calendar in use elsewhere.

Since those early years, International Women's Day has assumed a new global dimension for women in developed and developing countries alike.

The growing international women's movement, which has been strengthened by four global United Nations women's conferences, has helped make the commemoration a rallying point for coordinated efforts to demand women's rights and participation in the political and economic process. Increasingly, International Women's Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of women's rights¹.

In 1975 International Women's Day became part of the annual calendar of United Nations events celebrating and acknowledging significant milestones or issues and raising awareness across the world. It is now celebrated annually across the world with many countries now declaring IWD a public holiday.

Source:

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