



AFGHAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION REFUGEE & IMMIGRANT SERVICES

March 8, 2021
Toronto, Ontario

Happy International Women's Day.

Today, under the agonizing circumstances resulted from COVID-19 and in solidarity with our sisters worldwide who are battling with traumas of war, fear of displacement, uncertainties about their health, worries about their economic survival, we stand united seeking windows of hope and opportunities for change.

On March 8, we will yet celebrate another IWD, though in a different format due to circumstances imposed by the pandemic. The popular rallies with progressive chants in downtown Toronto must wait for now.

This year, virtual festivities are already well on their way throughout the month and across the globe. Our own AWO virtual celebration is taking place later this afternoon.

Women of my generation would remember the popular marches that were organized prior to the United Nations' declaration of March 8 in 1975 as a commemorative and universal occasion for observance. In fact, since 1911, labour activists in Europe planted the seeds for women around the world to join forces in protest and express their objections to the ways that they were being treated socially and economically.

This year, we are embracing the 110th anniversary of the modern times women's movement.

For decades, women worldwide have been advancing in spheres of corporate, science, technology, and management leadership roles. Many calibrated chairs in academia are led by women. Legislatures are home to more women. Therefore, some may contemplate why it continues to be important to still mark March 8 as a special day!

Women in industrial countries are still fighting some of the old issues. In Canada, 60% of the educated women at the middle management level never go further. We still earn 74 cents of a dollar that a man makes. The wage gap leads women to a lesser pension that further contributes to their sustained cycle of inequity and poverty.

At my line of work in refugee and settlement services, I see refugee women are repeatedly left to navigate their way to safety and look after their children single headedly. The level of mental health issues among them are frequently elevated, and often beyond resolve. Refugees who are accepted to Canada continue to face severe economic vulnerability and social isolation. They usually land on minimum income part time jobs in food services, retail, personal support, home childcare, and domestic work. These areas of employment are among the lowest paying jobs and recently hardest hit by COVID-19.

Women of all ages and all nations still need to assemble to prove unity, strength, and resilience. We need to sing our songs of courage, advocacy, and victory. Our words, actions, resources, strategies, and best practices need to inspire and spread.

Each one of us need to be on a quest to steward our environment, eradicate poverty, end discrimination and oppression, fight for equity, equality, and peace.

I stand on the shoulders of my mother, my aunts, my teachers, my wise landlord during my university years. I understand the strenuous battles that they fought to provide for me the privileges that I enjoy. I am forever indebted to them for their inspiration and wisdom.

Women need to assemble in unison to dismantle the glass ceilings.

We need to be the voice for the voiceless and the face for the unrepresented. It is only then that we will walk through the valleys and peaks and steer the path to a just and inclusive hub for those who side with us and who come after us.

We remain united, we stay strong!

Adeena Niazi

Executive Director

Afghan Women's Organization Refugee & Immigrant Services