



International Women's Day March 8, 2008

Today around the world individuals and groups are commemorating International Women's Day, March 8th, celebrating the courage and resilience of women human rights defenders who continue to dedicate their lives to the realization of *Human Rights for Women + Human Rights for All*.

This International Women's Day falls in a year that is dedicated to celebrating 60 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The dynamic activism taking place around the world today is a significant reminder to the international community that commitments made to advance human rights, including the equality and empowerment of women, must not be forgotten.

Today in every time zone, every city and region around the world, women are organizing and participating in events that celebrate the advancements of women in all walks of life. From music festivals and tributes in Sierra Leone to the Spirit of Africa Women awards in Kenya, the continent of Africa is vibrant with activism. In Costa Rica today, men and women are gathered at events that seek to raise awareness of women's issues, while across the islands of the Bahamas, radio programs are being broadcast celebrating the lives and achievements of local women. Women in Indonesia are using the day to lobby their government to implement policies to advance women's rights, and in Nepal, 3000 women are taking to the streets to peacefully re-assert their rights in the upcoming election. In New Zealand, art and poetry are being used as a means of bringing attention to women's issues, and in Australia women all across the country are gathering to network and commemorate this day together. In Saudi Arabia, expert meetings are taking place to highlight the role women have played in the economy and in Morocco, women of all ages are taking part in the 10th Casablanca Women's 10K run. In Oakville, Ontario, Canada windows across the town are being painted yellow in support of women's rights, while in Los Angeles California, USA, "political fashion shows" and marches are taking place to bring attention to issues of women in conflict. Feminists in Ireland are on symbolic walking tours, and in Spain, women are being recognized as entrepreneurs for the businesses they have set up overseas.

Within these diverse and dynamic celebrations on International Women's Day, there is also a strong call for the principles of human rights to be embraced by people around the world. Sparked by a civil society campaign launched by a group of notable personalities called the *Elders*, including Mary Robinson, Graça Machel, Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela, people around the world are signing a pledge to ensure that *Every Human Has Rights*. Within this campaign, the month of March is dedicated to the celebration and realization of women's human rights.

Center for Women's Global Leadership



Charlotte Bunch, Executive Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, celebrates 60 years of women's rights today with activists in Peru who have organized a public demonstration and a number of political and cultural events, under the slogan *centro a la vida* (sign to life). The *Elders* themselves have joined women's rights groups around the world to celebrate and offer their support and commitment to the realization of women's human rights. In Dubai today, Mary Robinson has joined a group of women business leaders to honor and celebrate their contributions. Across the Atlantic, Graça Machel has spent the past few weeks working to ensure that women's human rights are at the forefront of the peace negotiations in Kenya and will commemorate International Women's Day with women's rights groups in Africa. Ela Bhatt is in her home country of India marking International Women's Day with her colleagues from SEWA – the Self Employed Women's Association, and a stone's throw away, Muhammad Yunus is in Bangladesh reaffirming his commitment to women's human rights at an event with colleagues from Grameen Bank – which provides banking services to the poorest of the poor in rural Bangladesh – 97 per cent of its borrowers are women.

Together the voices and actions of the *Elders* and activists worldwide send a strong message; they are united in the struggle to realize human rights for all people and reinforce that this mission is not possible without the realization of human rights for all women.