March 8 marks International Women’s Day, a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity. On this occasion, the European Union issued a joint statement declaring that ‘Our Union is a pioneer in tackling gender-based discrimination and we can be proud of the progress achieved: Europe is one of the safest and most equal places for women in the world.’

The path to full equality in practice is still a long one however. Unfortunately women still have fewer
opportunities for career and business development than men, and women and girls still face harassment, abuse and violence. ‘We want girls and women to achieve equality in all aspects of life: access to education, equal pay for equal work, access to top positions in companies and politics as well as protection from violence,’ the EU stated in its statement.

"Advancing women's leadership and economic empowerment is an absolute priority for us."

In its recently published memo “What is the EU doing for women's rights and gender equality?”, the European Commission presents concrete actions to reduce the gender gap in many spheres and to combat gender-based violence.

But gender equality is not just about fairness and justice in Europe - it is indispensable to achieve peace, security, economic prosperity and sustainable growth around the world. Syrian women know this better than anyone else as it is them and their children who suffer the most from conflict. But they have never given up and the EU is making their voice heard. Very few Syrian women have managed to be members of the Negotiation Commission but as they say "when women meet together, they make things happen". And not only do they make things happen, they stand ready to share their experience to give support to women from other conflict areas.

Gender equality and women's empowerment must be promoted both inside and outside the EU. Our objectives are clear and through our work to realise them, we contribute to the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

In this spirit, in September last year, the EU, together with the UN, launched the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. This year the EU has the leadership of the "Call to Action for Protection Against Gender-Based Violence", bringing together over 60 countries and organisations, striving to ensure that gender-based violence is addressed in humanitarian crises.

World Economic Forum's 2017 Global Gender Gap Report findings show that gender parity is two centuries away, hence a strong call-to-action to #PressforProgress for gender parity, motivating and uniting people to think, act and be gender inclusive. Worldwide activism for women's equality, driven by movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp, demonstrate that there is a strong global momentum striving for gender parity. International Women’s Day 2018 is an opportunity to empower women in all settings, rural and urban, and celebrate the activists who are working relentlessly to claim women’s rights and realize their full potential.

And, on this occasion of International Women's Day 2018, High Representative Federica Mogherini was presented with the Women of Europe Award for Women in Power 2017, by the European Movement International.

"Investing in the potential of women and girls is an investment in our whole society and is the responsibility of men and boys as much as women and girls."

International Women's Day has occurred for well over a century, with the first March 8 IWD gathering supported by over a million people in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. Prior to this the Socialist Party of America, United Kingdom's Suffragists and
Suffragettes, and further groups campaigned for women equality.

Today, IWD belongs to all groups collectively everywhere.

IWD is not country, group or organisation specific.

Make IWD your day, everyday!

Photo © UN Women/Joe Saade

See also

Joint statement on the occasion of International Women's Day 2018
What is the EU doing for women's rights and gender equality? Q&A
Her Story Your Story - DG International Cooperation and Development
UN Women: Photo Essay - Rural women, human rights
UN Women: In Focus - International Women's Day
UN Women: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
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