

IWD 2019

Happy International Women's Day to all of you. What an amazing turnout again this year! I am so honoured to be here today.

Thank you, Tina, for the warm introduction, and also for sharing that powerful video. We saw that performed live at the CLC convention a few years back – I still get goose bumps when I think about it. So very powerful!

Although, I will never know the added struggle that comes with being an Indigenous woman, and the heartache of the loss of so many sister Indigenous women and girls, as well as the frustration of those flawed processes designed to reconcile past wrongs,

I will commit to do whatever I can, to work towards collective healing and true reconciliation.

I also want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, pay respect to their elders both past and present, and extend that respect to all Indigenous people who are here today.

And especially Indigenous women, who have been leaders on these lands for thousands and thousands of years. They continue to enrich and make significant contributions to our world today.

We know that the presence of settlers on these lands is not neutral; it has had, and continues to have, devastating impacts on many aspects of life for Indigenous people.

This bread and roses celebration has always been very special day for me.

My heart wants to burst when I see so many women, from so many experiences get together like this..

Every single one of you in this room has so much to share.

And the sharing that is happening in this room today is so empowering – I can feel the energy.

I am so grateful to be here.

They say gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. I believe that,

I am grateful to be part of a movement that is devoted to “being the change we want to see in our world”.

I grateful and proud to represent the NLFL and its 70,000 union members.

Unions work well for women and women work well for unions and I am very proud of our collective work in the labour movement.

But in our society, there are many women who do not have the same reality, and I cannot even begin to think of where women would be right now, if it wasn't, for the passion, compassion, energy and commitment of the hundreds of staff and volunteers who advocate every single day for a more equal, safe and just world for all women in the numerous organizations across the province who do this work.

Women who work tirelessly and give selflessly of themselves, often with very limited resources, and who provide so many programs and supports that literally save women's lives. Some of you are here today, and I want to say - Thank you for what you do.

I am grateful too, for the small role I play on the Board of Directors, along with some incredibly strong and committed staff and volunteers at the SJSWC/WC.

Women's organizations are on the frontlines when it comes to sexual harassment and violence, providing support and services to survivors and advocating for changes to ensure perpetrators are held accountable.

While gender-based violence costs the Canadian economy \$12 billion annually, these organizations have no stable funding and are struggling to survive. Part of our advocacy must include securing more funding to provide these services, and to fight for more government investment in quality public services that provide much needed services for all of us, and

good wages and benefits where many women work and support their families, and communities.

It really does take an entire community, and a lot of work towards our common goal to advance women's equality, women's economic empowerment.

But you know what? This is something that simply cannot wait. Women around the world cannot wait. In fact – the world can't wait.

So it really is time to say that we are **DONE WAITING!**

It is a great and timely theme for this year's Bread and Roses Brunch.

IWD began more than one hundred years ago in New York with a protest by 15,000 women working in the textile industries who walked out of their sweat shops and onto the streets and marched through the streets of New York City.

These women were **done waiting**.

Their demands were for the right to vote, shorter work hours, better pay and an end to sweat shops and child labour.

Five years later, continuing the call for better and safer working conditions was the Lawrence, Mass textile workers strike. The immediate response to

the lowering of workers' wages, and largely led by immigrant women workers, who took to the streets in a strike which eventually grew to more than 20,000 workers. That's where the slogan "Bread and Roses" is said to come from.

These women were **done waiting** as well. And in the era of a world war, women across Europe who were also **done waiting**, held rallies to campaign against the war and to express women's solidarity....

And from these actions came a global movement and the recognition of international women's days all across the world.

International Women's Day is all about unity, celebration, reflection, advocacy and action.

So today – let's reflect on where we have been, celebrate what we have accomplished over many years of fighting for equality, and commit to advocacy and action by using our power, our activism, and our voices.

When we look at the global picture - there have been big victories in the battle for women's equality.

Women have done their homework. We have acted politically over the past 100 years. And we have seen changes – positive changes that have made a real difference.

But we're not there yet - There are still many challenges.

Globally, only 50% of women participate in formal labour markets and have that sort of financial independence, compared to 77% of men.

In 17 countries – husbands can legally prevent their wives from working.

If women and girls were operating at their full potential and playing an equal role in the labour market, research tells us that achieving gender parity would be worth \$28 trillion to the world's global economy.

Economic equality for women is not a just a women's issue. When women are losing out – we are all losing out.

Especially at a time when there is so much economic uncertainty in the world, we just cannot afford to keep women out of the workforce, or anywhere else for that matter.

This is an economic and a political issue. And all the more reason why we cannot afford to keep waiting.

Economic empowerment goes right to the core of women's rights – it's not just about a job, it about access to money and bank accounts, it's about overcoming discriminatory laws, it's about tackling poverty, it's about tackling violence against women.

Around the world – 1 in 3 women experience gender-based violence. 1 in 3 !!! that is surprising for some of us to hear – for others – less so. It is horrific,

And unless we deal with **that** statistic - Women will never achieve equality.

Women hold up half the sky in this world. No country can afford to leave half its population behind.

Inequality has been going on for far too long, and frankly, the pace of change has not been quick enough – we can't keep waiting, and waiting, and accepting bits and pieces. So on this IWD – we have a great opportunity to take stock, and take action.

We may not change the world right away, but we can do our share of changing pieces that matter to us right here, and we have done that.

We're not always listened to by the decision makers. But, like those brave women before us, we persist, and I believe – with our collective strength, we can a difference – In fact we already do.

Women are finding their voices everywhere. We have seen it more recently with the METOO and TIMESUP movements, in the powerful testimony of Christine Blasey Ford, the courageous account last week from Jodi Wilson Raybould, women in our own government, sex workers speaking out through an exhibit at City Hall.

Sometimes those conversations create discomfort, and discussion, and action, and positive change.

We need to speak out!!

American writer, feminist and civil rights activist Audre Lorde said:

“Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down and suggest it’s personal.

And the world won’t end. And the speaking will get easier and easier.

And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had.

And at last you will know with surprising certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking.”

Those words give me such hope.

The sisterhood is indeed a powerful thing. I never doubt that we can change the world when we speak our truth.

Change happens when one woman stands up and says “I’m done waiting”!

And then another, and another, and another

So – here’s the question of the day?

Are you done waiting?

Yes? Well then, another question we must all ask ourselves is:

“If we are done waiting, then how are we going to use our power, our activism, and our voices?”

Here in NL, we have been working hard on many issues, meeting together, and with government towards an equality agenda.

We now have a stand-alone Minister, and Department responsible for the Status of Women.

That is an extremely important gain for the women of this Province, and we look forward to continuing our work with government, to try and influence legislative and policy decisions that address women's inequality.

Government has committed to act around the issues that many of us here in this room have been talking about for a long time - having a gender analysis on policies, budgets, and laws, and to end all forms of gender based violence. Their commitment is a very positive step.

But – the real victory for women's equality will be in their action.... **We will need to keep their feet to the fire on these very important issues.**

There have been recent legislative gains that will **begin** a process to protect and support victims of domestic violence at work.

We applaud those changes and we commit to continuing our political action to strengthen laws, regulations and policies to that end.

We know that political action is not only necessary, but it works.

In fact, we know that any gains that make us more equal have never just been handed to us.

They have been taken through our struggles and our collective political action.

The truth is - we can't let politics alone, because politics won't let us alone.

And as long as inequality exists between women and men, and even between the rich and the rest of us – then we have no choice.

We must be political!

So, keeping that in mind - let's look forward to the kind of progress we want to see in our communities, in our province, and in our country.

It can be tempting to look at our neighbours in the United States, and feel smug about things being better here - After all we have a Prime Minister who's not afraid to call himself a feminist right?

However feminism is as feminism does, and we need to remember that here in Canada, we are far from having achieved equality, especially for women, trans and non-binary folk and those who are indigenous, racialized, living with disabilities, or otherwise marginalized.

Sadly, although we are 52% of the population, women still face inequality in every facet of our lives; how we are paid, how we access the services we need; how we are treated, at work, at home, in the streets, on the media, how we are represented in all levels of government, and in those rooms where decisions are made that directly affect us.

We continue to have a stubbornly high wage gap! .66 cents here in NL - and that wage gap is even higher for some groups of women – like racialized, indigenous women and women with disabilities. we need to close this gap.

Families continue to struggle to find and pay for safe, high quality child care.

Women, all women - continue to experience sexual harassment and gender-based violence every single day.

We need a higher minimum wage. More than 60% of workers in this province who earn less than \$15 an hour are women.

Those facts disproportionately impact women's lives, and keeps them in poverty tight up to their senior years – the majority of seniors living in poverty are women.

We need investments in quality public services, education, health care, housing, and strategies and policies that address the additional inequalities that exist for women of colour, women with disabilities, indigenous women and all those who are underrepresented in society, and even disproportionately impacted.

It's 2019 – and we still struggle to access safe abortion services and the opponents of reproductive rights are relentless in their attempts to turn back the clock.

It's time we saw real progress on the many barriers women face.

Enough lip service, we're looking for action. And today, we commit to that action – that's why we're here right?

We are truly done waiting!! This is not simply a societal problem, but a political one, which requires political will to change.

This is an important year for politics – we are facing both a federal **and** provincial election.

Women continue to be under represented in every level of government and decision-making bodies in our country, and globally;

and make no mistake about it – when women become elected and take their place in leadership positions, it makes an incredible difference.

According to the Inter-Parliamentarian union, women hold 23% of all seats in Parliaments/Senates globally.

Canada is ranked 62nd, and although we are gaining momentum, at this rate it will take 50 years until women achieve parity. Quite frankly, we don't have 50 years. I don't know about you – but I don't think we can wait that long. 2069?? I don't think so!!!

The United Nations defines 30% as the minimal percentage of women required for government to reflect women's concerns.

Women in Canada represent 28% of mayors and 29% of councillors for an average of 26%. We would have to increase the number of women in municipal government by roughly 100 every year over the next 14 years.

Provincially, NL is at the low end of the threshold for women in government (25%). We need to do better.....But women need to feel okay about being in politics as well – welcome, safe, respected and heard....we have some work to do there as well.

Just think about it. Our government system was put in place before women even had the right to vote. It has been driven by and protected by men for a long time.

We cannot afford to let only half our population realize their potential. We need more women in politics, and in other places where decisions are made –

But that means addressing all the barriers that exist which make it hard for women to run and participate in government, or occupy positions of power in organizations. And we know there are many.

So what is our call to action?

Women's inequality is **not simply a societal problem, but a political one, which requires collective political will to change**

Interestingly, the Canadian Labour Congress has campaign to help us with that!

In keeping with our theme for this year's brunch, DONEWAITING, the CLC has an ongoing campaign which everyone here in this room, and your friends and families, can participate in.

It focuses on advocating and lobbying governments for changes around wage discrimination, violence and harassment, and government policies, programs and laws that address the **inequality** of women

This particular campaign targets federal politicians to pressure them to support our demands for an end to wage discrimination, gender-based violence, and to implement a quality, universal, affordable, public child care program.

Funny enough, these issues are as relevant to our province as to Ottawa, and with elections imminent – what better time to ask those candidates who'll be knocking on our doors very shortly, where they stand on these issues.

Here's our reality :

Women in Canada (and NL) are being paid less than men for work of equal value, regardless of their level of education, or whether they work full or part-time.

Women's wages shouldn't come at a discount. Who is benefitting when women are being paid less than men? Not women? Not the economy? When women make less over their working lives, they are more likely to live in poverty, and end up retiring into poverty.

Jobs should be valued based on skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions, leaving no room for gender discrimination.

That is why we need proactive pay equity legislation that will put an end to wage discrimination in Canada and in NL

Last year, the federal government promised pay equity legislation was coming.

Two years ago, on March 8th the provincial government unanimously supported a private members motion presented by Gerry Rogers and Lorraine Michael (NLNDP) to start the process to enact pay equity towards enacting pay equity legislation in this province.

Pay equity is about economic justice for women – we're done waiting.

You will see a petition on your tables urging the NL government to enact pay equity legislation. Please fill them out, and take them home and to work and get as many signatures as you can, and send them back to the NLFL.

Another Reality: Far too many women are dying because of gender-based violence – deaths that really could be preventable if our society were to actually take violence against women seriously.

Every 6 days – a woman in Canada is murdered by her intimate partner.

On any given night, some 3,500 women and their 2,500 children sleep in shelters because it isn't safe at home. And those numbers are there because that's all the spaces there are...they are all full.

It is staggering....

Our province has one of the highest rates of DV in the country, and we are one of the few provinces where DV is on the rise.

86% of the victims of intimate partner homicides in NL are women,

Gender-based violence – sexual harassment, family, domestic, intimate-partner violence is a daily reality for far too many women, and remains a very serious barrier to women's equality, especially in the workplace..

It can have serious consequences on women's physical, emotional and mental health, and on their work performance. Research by Canada's unions found that almost 40 percent of working women have experienced domestic violence and for most, it followed them to work, putting their jobs and their co-workers at risk.

Canada's unions are making workplaces safer for women by negotiating anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, better protection and intervention for women experiencing domestic violence, health and safety protections, and improved employee assistance, women's advocates, and support programs.

With leadership, education and action by governments, we can end sexual harassment and violence. We can make workplaces safe for women, and we can make sure that survivors are believed and that perpetrators are held accountable.

We can no longer just ask – and we are done waiting. We are demanding a comprehensive plan to end violence against women NOW!

A third reality for families is the struggle to find and pay for child care.

Although child care is not simply a women's issues, access to quality, affordable child care is about economic justice for women.

More women in Canada are working than ever before, and 70% of kids under 5 have moms working outside the home.

Here we are, in 2019, and we're still talking about an affordable, high quality child care program that women greeted at the Royal Commission Report in the 1970's – shameful!

Child care makes it possible for women to get a decent job, support their families, build a career, and further their education or training.

There are not enough regulated child care spaces available in Canada.

And the cost of those limited spaces is astronomical. Our child care costs are among the highest in the world **and among the highest in Canada.**

Finding child care is even harder for parents with infants or children with special needs, and for those living in Northern, Indigenous or rural communities.

Options for parents working shift or non-standard hours are almost nonexistent.

Pay for ELCC workers is shamefully low. These are the workers – majority who are women, to whom we entrust our children.

We can fix this crisis. The federal government has established a new framework on early learning and child care with their provincial and territorial counterparts.

We need the federal government to work with the provinces and territories to make sure that child care funding goes to building a system of high quality, universal, affordable, inclusive, public child care for all families.

Together, we can make a difference on all these issues, and more. Keeping the discussion on these issues alive with politicians, candidates, neighbours, friends, and families so important.

It sends a clear message that we are done waiting and we want action now!

A true measure of our democracy is a society that is inclusive, participatory, committed to political equality, policies and laws that are really for all people. That's our call to action!

We can engage, mobilize, educate, agitate, organize, act politically in whatever way we are comfortable. Sending a letter or an email is a political action, talking to people, signing a petition, volunteering to help a candidate get elected, voting – these are all political acts that send a clear message that we are done waiting.

Campaigns like #DoneWaiting are so important. They are critical to getting these changes that will create a more equal society.

Check it out www.donewaiting.ca

Today, as we celebrate all women - I want to issue a challenge to governments, community leaders, unions, employers, and to men.

We can be angry! We should be angry – women have been doing this work for a long-long-time.

We need to turn our anger into hope, and our hope into action.

The best way to do it – is to just do it!

Author Soraya Chemaly says ***“your anger is a gift to yourself and the world that is yours....if ever there was a time not to silence yourself, to channel your anger into healthy places and choices, this is it!”***

Women cannot fight alone. We need men to step up and join us in the struggle to end wage discrimination, gender-based violence, and for policies and programs like child care, that will eliminate women’s inequality.

We all need to step up to this challenge!!

And when we do that, and only when we do that – then – in the works of Arundhati Roy – another world is not only possible, she is on her way. And on a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.

Peace, Solidarity, and Sisterhood