

The History of International Women's Day

International Women's Day is a time for women around the world to commemorate their struggles and celebrate their achievements. The United Nations formally proclaimed March 8 International Women's Day in 1975.

The roots of International Women's Day can be traced back to the struggles of women workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

♀ In 1857, thousands of women working in the New York garment industry took to the streets to protest unfair wages, a 12-hour work day, and sexual harassment in the workplace.

♀ Conditions for working women did not improve. Female garment workers held another massive demonstration in New York in 1908. They renewed the call for fair treatment at work and demanded an end to child labour.

♀ On March 8, 1908, women gathered in New York City to rally around the issue of women's suffrage.

♀ In 1910, 100 women representing 17 countries voted to establish an International Women's Day. This took place at an International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen, Denmark.

♀ On March 25, 1911, a fire in a sweatshop owned by the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York killed 145 female garment workers. Unsafe conditions contributed to the high death toll. Many of the fire escapes were locked to prevent women from slipping out, even for a moment's break.

♀ Eighty thousand workers marched through the streets to attend the mass funeral for the victims.

♀ A year later, 14,000 textile workers went out on strike. With a rallying cry of "Better to starve fighting than starve working," the women stayed out for nearly three months.

Their courage inspired the song "Bread and Roses" which has become associated with International Women's Day. Bread symbolizes economic justice and roses represent quality of life.

March 8 marks women's efforts over the years to attain justice and equality for themselves and their children.

