

International Women's Day March 8, 2010

In 1975, the United Nations began celebrating March 8th as International Women's Day. March 8th remains a day for reflecting upon and recognizing all women's past and current struggles and achievements, and the contributions they have made and continue to make to society.

International Women's Day emerged from the labour movement in Europe and North America during early twentieth century. Historical events such as the tragic 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, where more than 140 women lost their lives due to poor and unsafe working conditions, led to legislation requiring improved factory safety standards and the International Ladies' Garment Worker's Union.

Although it is 2010 and working conditions have greatly improved, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission still receives complaints from individuals who experience sexual harassment, discrimination because of pregnancy, and other forms of sex discrimination. In 2008-2009 13.5% of all complaints received by the Commission involved discrimination based on sex (gender).

It has been 31 years since *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* was legislated, making it unlawful for employers to use a pregnancy or maternity leave as an excuse to terminate a woman from her job. Yet the Commission continues to receive complaints from women alleging discrimination because of pregnancy. Do some employers believe themselves to be above the law by using a pregnancy as the opportunity to get rid of an employee without having to meet their legal obligations?

Some employers do not seem to understand the significance and the stability of having a job to return to after maternity leave. As the Supreme Court of Canada stated in 1989, "That those who bear children and benefit society as a whole thereby should not be economically or socially disadvantaged seems to bespeak the obvious."

Sexual harassment also remains a challenge to women in employment. In 2008-2009, almost 10% of all complaints received by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission alleged sexual harassment. Sexual harassment poisons the work environment for those who experience it. Sometimes it is unintentional, like email jokes, but sometimes it is an abuse of power by someone who knows the victim will hesitate to complain for fear of reprisals or economic consequences.

This year marks the 35th anniversary since the United Nations officially began celebrating International Women's Day. As the struggle towards equality continues for women, it is important to celebrate gains but also to recognize that we have more work to do in ensuring that all women are advanced and protected. As we celebrate International Women's Day in 2010, let us pledge to work towards greater gender equality. It is time to close the gap between the sexes that prevents women from realizing their full potential in Saskatchewan society.

LINKING TO THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
WEBSITE click on <http://www.internationalwomensday.com>

