

Privilege Speech
15th City Council
Sangguniang Panlungsod
Davao City
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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MONTH

By Councilor Pilar C. Braga, PhD

Madam President, the month of March is upon us again and to us women, the month of March is special because the women of the world started its long journey towards emancipation on March 1911, exactly 99 years ago.

The observance of International Women's Day (IWD) was a result of the labor-organizing activities of women in the early 20th century. Between 1909 and 1911, working women in the United States of America participated in concerted union activities of the National Women's Trade Union League and other concerned groups who protested against low wages, lack of protective legislation and the very poor working conditions to which women workers were subjected during that time.

Such demonstrations had been the offshoot of the March 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York that took the lives of more than 140 working girls. Subsequently, the inhumane working conditions and other unfair labor practices leading up to the disaster were invoked during observances of International Women's Day (IWD).

In Europe, the Socialist Women's International group demanded March 8th be declared as the International Women's Day, celebrated each year to recognize working women around the world. The celebration of IWD has since stimulated major historical events. For instance, IWD was the inspiration for the general strike which began the Russian Revolution in St. Petersburg in 1917 when 10,000 women textile workers demonstrated.

It is due to such history of women organizing around the world that IWD was officially recognized by the United Nations to celebrate women's contributions to all societies.

For our part, we have been fortunate enough to bear witness to the passage of laws that served as the legal bases for the celebration of the National Women's Day/Month in the Philippines during the term of former President Corazon Aquino, our first women president. Such laws provided affirmation to the International community that we are one with them in the struggle for civil liberties, equality and human rights.

In Davao City, we are likewise truly proud to declare that we have given birth to the Women's Development Code which served as the benchmark for some subsequent national legislations, among which is Republic Act 9262, otherwise known as the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004 – a law which in itself, took ten years in the making.

These developments in our history are a far cry from the former place of the Filipino woman in history. There was a time when we were not allowed to vote. Today, we bear witness to having not one, but two Filipino women Presidents serving our country and its people. In the past, the Filipino woman had no opportunity to go to school and obtain a degree – these days, you see Filipino women flourishing in the academe – whether it be a student in the Dean's List or being appointed as the Dean of a College.

Back then, no Filipino woman could exercise a profession. Today we can simply look at Davao City – we have several Filipino women serving as public servants in the legislative, executive and judicial departments. Last Saturday, we even bore witness to the proclamation of the very first woman President of the Integrated bar of the Philippines Davao City Chapter. Indeed, the Filipino woman has\ come a long way.

However, the struggle for civil liberties, equality and human rights are far from over.

Alongside these “little victories” that the Filipino woman has fought so bravely these past few decades, there persists, a significant amount of violations of the rights given to them.

We need not look past our city to see that there are women from all walks of life being abused physically and emotionally by their husbands or domestic partners. There are still prostituted women who, despite the struggle to be seen as the victims, are still portrayed as the offenders. There are still various establishments that thrive on the commercialization and commodification of women in the guise of beauty contests and the like.

Yes, the struggle is far from over.

Indeed, we do not have to go far to see that various transgressions against women's rights are being committed every single day. These transgressions only create a deeper divide and are truly against the vision of a society where men and women are equal, both in the rights afforded as well as in the opportunities given to them.

The celebration of National Women's Day/Month is not about women asserting superiority over the men, but a declaration that women have the same rights as men in our society. This declaration has been the product of the years of struggle and numerous lives sacrificed for the cause.

Today, we pay tribute to those women who paved the way for future generations of women enjoying the opportunities that they have now.

Today, we affirm that violence, in whatever form, committed against a woman, constitutes a violation of human rights.

Today, we celebrate the idea that society, if it is to be one that is healthy and progressive, necessitates that it be built on a solid foundation that recognizes the inherent equality that exists between women and men.

Thank you and good day.

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City Councilor