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05 MAR

11 Women Paving the Way

by: [Arden Jobling-Hey](#) in: [Editor's Desk](#)

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This International Women's Day, Verge celebrates the accomplishments of women who are paving the way.

HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY! This glorious day (yes, this blogger is female) has been celebrating since the early 1900s, since the 15,000 women marched through the center of New York City, demanding shorter hours, better pay and voting rights in 1908.

For years, women's day shuttled back and forth between the Gregorian and Julian calendar (some countries had still not yet transitioned to the Gregorian calendar - [see the full history here](#)), but finally, in 1913, March 8th finally became the agreed upon day of recognition in and is now celebrated by women everywhere, from Moscow to Munich, Washington...and beyond!

The first formal recognition of the rights for which so many women stood their ground was in the [Charter of the United Nations](#), signed in 1945. The Charter was the first international agreement to proclaim gender equality as a fundamental human right. Today, gender equality has become a central component of politics and policies the world over. In fact, the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women became one of the priority areas targeted by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), established by the international community in 2000.

Unfortunately, as is too often the case, achievements in this domain have been few and far between. According to the UNDP who offer a "where do we stand" [analysis and summary of the MDGs online](#), there remain high disparities in education; unequal access to universities (access to university level education and completion rates are much lower); and low rates of women in paid employment (as low as 20 per cent in Southern Asia, Northern Africa, and Western Asia, and 32 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa). The good news however, is that the presence of women in politics is on the rise! Change is slow and any progress should be celebrated, right?

So, in an effort to focus on steps that have been taken in the right direction, today, we celebrate the 8th of March as a day without boundaries, a day where women the world over are inspired to take action to rejoice in achievements and acknowledge challenges that lay ahead. Today we celebrate the accomplishments of women who reach for the stars around the world in various fields and of every nationality!

Here are some of our favourites:

Women in Government

Queen Rainia: [Voted one of Forbes 100 most powerful women](#), Queen Rania (wife of Jordan's King, Abdullah bin Al-Hussein) uses her role to fight for adequate housing and education; a better role for women in Jordan; and champions an organization that fights child abuse, the

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first of its kind in the Arab world. She continually advocates for women's rights and is a key speaker at the World Economic Forum, urging attendees to promote peace and combat poverty.

Maria Bashir: Herat's Chief Prosecutor and the very first female prosecutor in Afghanistan. Suspended during Taliban rule, Bashir has to travel everywhere under the protection of body guards and receives threats on a daily basis.

Women in Media

Marie Colvin: Winner of the International Women's Media Foundation Courage in Journalism Award and former correspondent for the Sunday Times, in London. Colvin was killed in a mortar attack in Homs, Syria alongside French photographer Remi Ochlik. According to IWMF Board co-chair, "Her courageous reporting inspired women journalists around the world."

J.K Rowling: Author of the best-selling book series (over 400 million copies sold) Harry Potter and creative genius. By tapping into the imagination of millions, she made the lives of readers just a little bit lighter.

Women in Business

Cheryl Sandberg: COO of Facebook. In the age of digital media, Sandberg manages a database of over 70 million users, representing 11 per cent of the world's population. With great power, comes great responsibility! Yikes.

Indra Nooyi: Chairman and chief executive officer of PepsiCo Inc. Her job description includes overseeing a staff of over 300,000 staff members worldwide! Nicely done Indra.

Women for Peace

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (President of Liberia), Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkol Karman: Jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2011 for their "non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work."

Ayan San Suu Kyi: Winner of Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, Ayan San Suu Ky has been put under and released from house arrest since 1989 for her efforts to bring democracy to the people of Burma who were able to participate in the first general election in 20 years in 2010.

Fan Favourite

Angelina Jolie: Known for her roles both on and off-screen, this actress and UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador (since 2001), has been on over 40 field missions on behalf of the UN's refugee agency, highlighting the plight of millions and advocating their protection. Her numerous contributions in the form of support and personal donations to various foundations and NGOs can be read in detail [here](#).

Useful Links for IWD:

UN link to IWD: <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/women/womday97.htm>

The women's information network: <http://internationalwomensday.org/#>

For more information on the status of the MDGs, including full MDG Report 2011: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/library/page/mdg/MDG_Report_2011.html

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ARDEN JOBLING-HEY

outreach, events

Originally from Toronto, Arden has studied, volunteered and worked her way around the world. From promoting HIV/AIDS awareness as an international volunteer in Tanzania and teaching business English in Germany, to exploring hidden treasures of the Turkish bazaar and accepting a fairy tale proposal amidst the dunes of the Moroccan dessert. Arden believes that as long as there are unknown lands to discover, the adventure never ends! She holds an M.A in International Communications and Development from City University London in the UK and has worked as a freelance writer and a development practitioner for a number of NGOs.

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