

International Women's Day

March 8, 2003

In 1975, the United Nations proclaimed March 8 to be the day on which women around the world should commemorate their struggles and celebrate their achievements.

But its history actually goes back more than a century before that day. In 1857, women garment workers in New York staged a massive street protest about the 12-hour workdays, poverty wages and sexual harassment that were common in their jobs. Fifty-one years later, they held the same massive demonstration in New York, adding the problems of the lack of women's suffrage and continuing child labor to the list of women's burdens.

In 1910, women in 17 countries, attending the Conference of Socialist Women in Denmark, vote to establish an International Women's Day March.

Continuing outrage at the plight of women, fueled by the tragic loss of young women in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 and the Textile Workers Strike in 1912 that inspired the song "Bread and Roses" (bread symbolizing wages, and roses symbolizing the quality of life) helped to create a common bond across countries and industries for women workers.

March 8 became known as the day that marks women's efforts to attain justice and equality for themselves and their children.