

# International Women's Day – a personal reflection

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## Women of the World Unite – you have nothing to lose but your chains

When thinking about what International Women's Day means to me, I am reminded of all of the struggles women have endured across the world and the rights they have fought for across the centuries, and continue to fight for today.

From reproductive rights to equal pay, the struggle continues for women across the world. From a young age, I have been involved in some of these struggles – from being involved in women's groups in the 80s – including picketing the Sunday Sport in Ancoats, and supergluing locks on the doors of sex shops in the city centre; through to supporting women in Manchester as the chair of the Pankhurst Centre in late 90s. I've been involved in campaigns for the rights of lesbians in this country, supporting women in Ireland, Nicaragua and South Africa, as part of their struggles for self-determination, through to campaigning for women's rights to abortion in this country. I've been around the block, so to speak! More recently, the fight for sex-based rights for women is something that has had me thinking a lot about the 'lot' of women. As a working-class disabled lesbian, I consider myself both a feminist and a socialist, and the intersection between my different 'identities' has sometimes given me sleepless nights and led me to question where I 'belong' – but as I've gotten older I've obsessed less about 'fit' and more about being vocal. I've plenty of heroines – Angela Davis and her Marxist feminist analysis, 'Women, Race and Class'; Bernadette Devlin and her struggle for Irish liberation; Rosa Luxemburg; Rigoberta Menchu; the suffragettes; and many more...

Standing up for what I believe in is something I feel lucky, and privileged, to be able to do. As a charity CEO, I spend a lot of time buttoning my lip, so to speak. I've plenty to say on machinery of government in this country and how that plays out locally; on struggles across the world; what's happening to women in Afghanistan; not to mention what's happening in the USA; and the rights of women closer to home – but often find myself 'curbing my enthusiasm' to speak up. But to be honest, now is the time for all women to speak up, to show solidarity, and to fight for change!

International Women's Day to me isn't a holiday, or a reason to go for a pamper session, it's a reminder for all women to fight for their rights, and for each other. As Dr Martin Luther King said, and echoed by Dr Maya Angelou (another of my heroines), "No one is free until we are all free"

The theme of this year's International Women's Day – which in case you don't know, is always on March 8th – is 'Accelerate Action'. I like that theme, as we all need to take more action to improve the lives of women, here and across the world – after all, as the WSPU slogan stated, "Deeds Not Words" is what matters.

