

The Institute for Catalan Studies and the International Women's Day, 2006–2013

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MANY COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD celebrate the International Women's Day (IWD), which commemorates women's past struggles to reivindicat their rights, recognizes their social achievements in those struggles and looks ahead to what remains still to do to gain full and

equal participation in society. The United Nations (UN) started celebrating the IWD on 8 March in 1975, on the occasion of the International Women's Year. In December 1977, a resolution of the UN General Assembly proclaimed a UN Day for Women's Rights and International Peace, which would be observed on any day of the year by Member States, according to their traditions. In fact, a Women's Day had been observed since the early 20th century, when the Socialist Party of America designated the last Sunday of February as the National Woman's Day. According to Temma Kaplan, in Europe, it was first celebrated on March 18, 1911, coinciding with the 40th anniversary of the Paris Commune [On the origins of International Women's Day. *Feminist Studies* (1985) 11:163-171]. Nowadays, the IWD is observed in more than 100 countries and in some of them it is even an official public holiday.

As the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon wrote: «Countries with more gender equality have better economic growth. Companies with more women leaders perform better. Peace agreements that include women are more durable. Parliaments with more women enact more legislation on key social issues such as health, education, anti-discrimination and child support. The evidence is clear: equality for women means progress for all.»

International Women's Day is celebrated in many countries around the world. It is a day when women are recognized for their achievements without regard to divisions, whether national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political. It is an occasion for looking back on past struggles and accomplishments, and more importantly, for looking ahead to the untapped potential and opportunities that await future generations of women.

International Women's Day first emerged from the activities of labour movements at the turn of the twentieth century in North America and across Europe:

1909 The first National Woman's Day was observed in the United States on 28 February. The Socialist Party of America designated this day in honor of the 1908 garment workers' strike in New York, where women protested against working conditions.



Fig. 1. Fragment of *The School of Athens*, one of the most famous frescoes by Raphael, painted for the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican between 1509 and 1510. The interpretation of this figure as Hypathia (square) seems to have originated from the Internet. With some exceptions, serious sources do not accept it.

1910 The Socialist International, meeting in Copenhagen, established a Women's Day to honor the movement for women's rights and to build support for achieving universal suffrage for women. The proposal was greeted with unanimous approval by the conference of over 100 women from 17 countries, which included the first three women elected to the Finnish Parliament. No fixed date was selected for the observance.

1911 As a result of the Copenhagen initiative, IWD was marked for the first time (19 March) in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, where more than one million women and men attended rallies. In addition to the right to vote and to hold public office, they demanded women's rights to work, to vocational training and to an end to discrimination on the job.

1913–1914 International Women's Day also became a mechanism for protesting World War I. As part of the peace movement, Russian women observed their first IWD on the last Sunday in February. Elsewhere in Europe, on or around 8 March of the following year, women held rallies either to protest the war or to express solidarity with other activists.

1917 Against the backdrop of the war, women in Russia again chose to protest and strike for "Bread and Peace" on the last Sunday in February (which fell on 8 March on the Gregorian calendar). Four days later, the Czar abdicated and the provisional Government granted women the right to vote.

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Since those early years, the growing international women's movement, which has been strengthened by four global UN women's conferences, has helped make the commemoration a rallying point to build support for women's rights and participation in the political and economic arenas. Increasingly, IWD is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities. Accordingly, the Institute for Catalan Studies, always eager to follow international trends and multi-national cooperation, is celebrating the IWD since 2006 with a special session held during the week of March 8. Female researchers and scholars have talked on a great variety of topics, as shown in the box below. ■



International Women's Day at the Institute for Catalan Studies

2006	"The challenges of subalternity: Women's movements" Mary Nash, University of Barcelona
2007	"The eloquent silence of Rachel Carson" Mercè Piqueras, Catalan Association for Science Communication (ACCC)
2008	"Laura Bassi and Giuseppe Cerati: an 'electric' couple" Marta Cavazza, University of Bologna
2009	"Sex and family throughout evolution" Anna Omedes, Barcelona Natural History Museum
2010	"European Spatial Agency (ESA) Gaia Mission" Carme Jordi, University of Barcelona
2011	"Women, reproduction, and <i>in vitro</i> fertilization" Francesca Vidal, Autonomous University of Barcelona
2012	"Lynn Margulis: The will to be, the impetus to do" Carmen Chica, <i>International Microbiology</i> ; Olga Guerrero Miracle, soprano; et al.
2013	"Two cultures, three cultures, or one only culture?" Dacha Atienza, Barcelona Natural Science Museum; Mercè Berlanga, University of Barcelona; and Genoveva Martí, Catalan Institution for Research and Advanced Studies (ICREA)