

**THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WAWZONEK  
MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE STATUS  
OF WOMEN**

**NO.: 129-19(2)**

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### **International Women's Day**

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in advance of International Women's Day. In 1975, the United Nations designated March 8<sup>th</sup> as an opportunity for unity, celebration, reflection, advocacy and action about the place and role of women across the social, economic, cultural, and political fabric of the world. While it is a day for celebration, on reflection, we must raise awareness of the work that is left to be done towards gender equality.

The theme of this year's International Women's Day is Choose to Challenge.

Mr. Speaker, I decided to search the definition of challenge. What I found is that challenge is to question the correctness of something. In other words, to ask ourselves, if a way of being, a way of thinking, as assumption that things must be a certain way, is in fact based on fact and evidence or if it might be based on beliefs we were raised with, assumptions, stereotypes or fear.

If we all choose to challenge, we acknowledge that we likely all have some beliefs, assumptions, ideas or views that should be questioned.

The theme also challenges everyone to identify and call out gender bias and inequality and to work on changing people's attitudes and behaviours in order to create a fairer, more inclusive society.

Mr. Speaker, governments can also choose to challenge. Doing things the way they have always been done is easier. The processes and the systems are in place. But to truly challenge those processes and those systems takes courage, patience, and humility.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is choosing to challenge inequality by proposing the creation of a Gender Equity Unit.

The work of the Gender Equity Unit will include:

- Making sure the GNWT's commitment to gender equality is included and reflected in budgets, policies and programs;
- Promoting and training staff on how to use Gender-Based Analysis Plus to assess how diverse groups of women/girls, men/boys, and gender-diverse people may experience government policies, programs and initiatives;
- Coordinating cross-departmental action on gender issues and women's economic empowerment; and,
- Promoting gender equity and leadership at senior levels.

In short, Mr. Speaker, the Gender Equity Unit needs to challenge the way we make decisions and allocate resources. History and science tell us that challenging social norms and standing up for a diversity of voices and perspectives can improve decision-making and organizational functioning. But that choice is far from easy. This will make our decision making better, more inclusive, and more productive.

The Gender Equity Unit will also support the continuation of the Campaign School for Women, which equips women with tools and supports to run for elected leadership. The success of the Campaign School for Women can be measured by the

increased number of women who are running for office. We need to choose to challenge our own ideas of who should run and who should win and what they are capable of.

In this Chamber, the elected leadership of the Northwest Territories now counts nine women around this circle, the most women ever elected to a Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, one election does not mean that the challenge of gender equity is conquered. We, all of us, cannot allow ourselves to forget that one election has not changed the fact that the Northwest Territories was until this election at or near the bottom in terms of gender representativeness across Canada, or that we still have the second highest rate of gender-based violence. We must still choose to challenge every day, in how we govern, and in how we look at one another.

As the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, I choose to challenge. I choose to challenge gender bias. I choose to challenge inequality. I choose to challenge discomfort, fear, and unfamiliarity and to embrace my role as a Member of the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly to ensure that gender diversity becomes a new normal and not merely historic.

Mr. Speaker, I hope others can take a moment to consider whether or how they too can choose to challenge in celebration of International Women's Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.