

International Women's Day

Mr. Speaker, today is International Women's Day, an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of women, to raise awareness of gender inequality, and to recommit to building a territory that values, respects and gives equal opportunity to all women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Each of us can actively embrace the spirit of "Every Woman Counts" in the workplace, our homes, or among our friends and communities. Each of us can challenge gender stereotypes, call out discrimination, draw attention to bias, and seek inclusion. From grassroots action to wide-scale momentum, we must work to support women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people of all ages and walks of life.

Today, I want to recognize some grassroots organizations that are dedicated to this important work: the Status of Women Council of the NWT, the Native Women's Association of the NWT, the Northern Mosaic Network, the YWCA, FOXY, and the Black Advocacy Coalition.

These organizations raise our collective awareness of the equity issues facing many Northern residents today. Their hard work keeps issues of gender equality at the forefront of public discourse. Their boards, staff, and volunteers share the passion and excitement that comes from valuing and supporting difference. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all of them for the work they do to address issues of gender-based violence, racism, and gender-based discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, the Gender Equity Division has supported Women in Leadership initiatives over the life of this Legislative Assembly to encourage the participation of women in political leadership, equipping them with tools and supports to run for elected office. If we want to

measure the success and importance of this program, we can simply look at all the elected women in this room right now, and all the elected women holding office across the NWT.

It is an honour to be part of the first gender-balanced Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories. Over the life of this Legislative Assembly, Northwest Territories' voters have elected women in unprecedented numbers at all levels of government including Chiefs, Mayors, and Councilors.

While I feel great pride for the progress we have made, I must also acknowledge that women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people continue to experience daily discrimination due to the long-standing systems that do not serve them. From unequal salaries and lack of financial independence, to being victims and survivors of gender-based violence and domestic abuse, many women continue to face challenges that stem directly from gender bias and inequality.

At this very moment, there are women across this Territory who are stuck in cycles of poverty and violence, forced to make difficult choices every day that put their safety at risk. We all have a duty to identify and disrupt the systems that allow this reality.

Mr. Speaker, Indigenous women are 3.5 times more likely to experience violence and we continue to hear reports of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse peoples. As the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, I reaffirm this government's commitment to address the evolving nature of work related to gender, including gendered violence and gender equity.

We are making progress on the 94 actions identified in "Changing the Relationship", our response to the Calls for Justice on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people and we continue to look to the federal government, our community partners and Indigenous governments to work with us in ending this terrible crisis.

Mr. Speaker, we have much to celebrate on International Women's Day. It is important to acknowledge the work that has been done and to honour and recognize women,

2SLGBTQIA+ people, allies and grassroots organizations who have gotten us here today. But the work to forge gender equity is not limited to women. We must all be allies to support the social, cultural, and political advancement of women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people in the territory.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that together we can forge women's equality and a world where "Every Woman Counts".

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.