Key Dates in International Women’s History

1911 First ever International Women’s Day celebrated.

1913 Marie Curie is awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry. Norwegian women gain the right to vote.

1915 Women from the U.S. and Europe gather in The Hague in the Netherlands for the first International Congress of Women -- later known as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

1916 Jeannette Rankin of Montana is the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress.

1918 Women in Russia strike for “bread and peace.” The strike helps initiate the revolution that results in the overthrow of the imperial government. March 8th, the day the strike began, is later chosen to mark International Women’s Day. Canadian women gain the right to vote. British women over 30 are granted right to vote. The Indian National Congress supports giving women the right to vote. Hungarian feminist Rosika Schwimmer is appointed ambassador to Switzerland.

1919 Women enter the British House of Commons for the first time with Lady Astor’s appointment.

1920 The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving women the right to vote, becomes law when it is ratified by two-thirds of the states. The League of Women Voters is founded.

International Women’s Day was first celebrated on March 8th, 1911. A look back at the last century illustrates the overwhelming progress that women around the world have made.
The Treaty of Versailles states that women must receive equal pay as their male counterparts.

1922 The National Council of Women is created in Chile to fight for women’s rights.

The Brazilian Federation for the Advancement of Women is founded by Bertha Lutz.

1923 Family planning pioneer Margaret Sanger opens the first legal, physician-run birth control clinic in the United States.

1925 Nellie Tayloe Ross is the first woman governor of a U.S. state (Wyoming).

1926 Gertrude Ederle is the first woman to swim the English Channel.

1928 Women compete for the first time in Olympic field events.

1931 Activist Jane Addams receives the Nobel Prize for Peace. She is the first American woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize.

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney founds The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, becoming the first woman to found a major art museum.

1932 Amelia Earhart makes the first solo flight by a woman across the Atlantic. She is the first woman to be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Alexandra Kollontai is appointed ambassador from the Soviet Union to Sweden. She is considered the first woman ambassador in modern history.

1933 Frances Perkins is appointed Secretary of Labor by Franklin D. Roosevelt. She is the first woman appointed to a cabinet position in the American government.

1934 Women in Brazil and Thailand gain the right to vote.

1937 Cuba requires equal pay for equal work regardless of gender.

1945 Eleanor Roosevelt becomes the American delegate for the recently formed United Nations. In 1946 she is elected as the head of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. She is instrumental in drafting the Declaration of Human Rights.

1946 The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is formed.

The Sudanese Women’s League is founded. It is modern Sudan’s first women’s organization.

Women in the Philippines gain the right to vote.

1948 In Japan, women vote and run for election in the House of Representatives for the first time.

1949 Women gain the right to vote in Israel and South Korea.

The Peronista Feminist Party is founded in Argentinian by Eva Perón.

The Second Sex (Le Deuxième Sexe), by French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, is published. It has a major impact on understandings of gender.
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1952  Molecular biologist Rosalind Franklin begins work at King’s College, London. She goes on to play a major role in the discovery of DNA.

Israel passes the Women’s Equal Rights Act, making gender discrimination illegal.

1954  Colombian women are granted the right to vote.

1955  Rosa Park’s refusal to give up her seat to a white man on a bus, and her subsequent arrest, is used to launch the Montgomery bus boycott.

1956  In Israel, Golda Meir is appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. She is the only woman in the Israeli cabinet.

1958  Swedish diplomat Agda Rössel is the first woman to head a permanent delegation to the United Nations.

1960  Sirimavo Bandaranaike is elected as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.

In Japan, Nakayama Masa is appointed Minister of Health and Welfare. She is Japan’s first female cabinet member.

1961  Paraguay grants women the right to vote. It is the last republic in the Americas to do so.

1963  Betty Friedan publishes The Feminine Mystique, which galvanizes the women’s rights movement. Valentina Tereshkova of Russia becomes the first woman in space.

Iranian women gain the right to vote.

1964  Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race or sex.

1965  The Supreme Court ruling in the Griswold v. State of Connecticut case states that laws prohibiting the use of birth control are unconstitutional.

1966  The National Organization of Women is founded by feminist Betty Friedan and other delegates to the Third National Conference of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Indira Gandhi becomes India’s first female Prime Minister.

1968  Soong Ching-ling is named Co-Chairwoman of the People’s Republic of China. She is the first non-royal woman to lead the state of China.

1969  Golda Meir becomes Israel’s first female prime minister.

1970  The Boston Women’s Health Book Collective helps launch the women’s health movement in the U.S. by publishing Our Bodies, Ourselves.

1971  India launches its National Commission on the Status of Women.

Helga Pederson becomes the first female judge on the European Court of Human Rights.

Women in Switzerland gain the right to vote.
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Title IX of the Education Amendments bans sex discrimination in schools. Enrollment of women in athletics programs and professional schools increases dramatically. Ms Magazine is launched by a group of feminists, including Gloria Steinem, as an outlet for feminist voices in America.</td>
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<td>1973</td>
<td>Tennis star Billie Jean King wins the “battle-of-the-sexes” tennis match against Bobby Riggs. The event is highly publicized and serves as inspiration for demands for equal rights and opportunities for female athletes. The Roe v. Wade decision by the Supreme Court rules that a woman has a constitutional right to abortion. Sex-segregated “help wanted” ads are banned following the Supreme Court ruling in Pittsburgh Press v. Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations, 413 U.S. 376. Women in Jordan gain the right to vote.</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>Maria Estela (Isabela) Martinez de Peron becomes the first women to lead an American nation when she succeeds her husband as President of Argentina. She is also the first female president of Argentina.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>The UN names 1975 International Women’s Year. March 8th has been celebrated as International Women’s Day ever since. The World Congress for International Women’s Year opens in Berlin. The first World Conference on Women is held in Mexico City. The Pregnancy and Discrimination Act is passed to prohibit discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions.</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>Discrimination on the basis of sex or marital status is prohibited by law in Canada. Nigerian women gain the right to vote.</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>Women’s History Week is first celebrated in Sonoma County, California. Kuwaiti women’s protests successfully keep a proposed law prohibiting women from work in offices from legally passing.</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>The UN General Assembly adopts the Convention on the Eliminations of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It defines what counts as discrimination against women and creates an agenda for nations to adopt. Mother Teresa is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in the slums of Calcutta, India.</td>
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Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo becomes the first female Prime Minister of Portugal.

Lidia Geiler is elected President of Bolivia. She is the first woman to hold this position.

Margaret Thatcher becomes Great Britain’s first female Prime Minister.

Simone Weil of France becomes the first woman elected President of the European Parliament.

1980 Vigdis Finnbogadottir becomes the first woman elected President of Iceland.


Sandra Day O’Connor is the first woman on the U.S. Supreme Court, serving until 2006.

Gro Harlem Brundtland becomes the first woman Prime Minister of Norway.

1982 Agatha Barbara is the first woman elected President of Malta.

Milka Planinc is the first woman to become Prime Minister of Yugoslavia.

1983 Sally Ride becomes the first American woman to travel in space.

1985 Eugenia Charles is the first woman to become Prime Minister in the Caribbean.

1986 Corazon Aquino is the first woman to be elected president of the Philippines.

Maria Liberia-Peters becomes the first woman Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles.

1987 Congress expands Women’s History Week to a month-long event celebrated in March.

Wilma Mankiller is named the first woman Chief of the Cherokee Nation. She is the first woman to lead a major Native American Tribe in modern history.

1988 Benazir Bhutto is the first woman to lead a Muslim country in modern history when she becomes prime minister of Pakistan.

1990 Mary Robinson is the first female President of Ireland.

Ertha Pascal-Trouillot is the first woman to be elected President of Haiti.

Carmen Lawrence is the first female Premier of Australia.

1991 Edith Cresson is the first woman Prime Minister of France.

Khaleda Zia Rahman is the first woman Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

1992 Rita Johnston is the first female Premier of Canada.

1992 Hanna Suchocka is the first female Prime Minister of Poland.

1993 Janet Reno is the first woman Attorney General of the United States.

Toni Morrison becomes the first African-American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

Sylvie Kinigi is the first female Prime Minister of Burundi.

Tansu Ciller is Turkey’s first female Prime Minister.
1995  The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo creates a Program of Action. Some of the goals outlined by the Program of Action include, achieving universal education, reducing infant and child mortality, reducing maternal mortality, and achieving access to reproductive and sexual health services including family planning.

The 4th World Conference on Women is held in Beijing, China.

1997  Madeleine Albright is sworn in as the first woman U.S. Secretary of State.

Jenny Shipley becomes the first woman Prime Minister of New Zealand.

1999  Mireya Moscoso is elected as Panama’s first female president. She oversees the U.S. handover of the Panama Canal.


Beverley McLachlin becomes the first female chief justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. The Canadian Supreme Court had ruled that women were not “persons” 70 years earlier.

Tarja Halonen is elected Finland’s first woman president.

2001  A referendum including the right of women to stand for office is approved by voters in Bahrain.

2004  Megawati Sukarnoputri becomes the first female President of the Republic of Indonesia.

2005  Condoleezza Rice is the first African-American woman to serve as U.S. Secretary of State.

2004  Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmental activist, is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She is the first black African woman to win a Nobel Prize.

Kuwaiti women gain the right to vote.

2006  Ellen Johnson Sirleaf becomes the first female President in Africa when she is elected in Liberia.

Michelle Bachelet is the first woman elected President of Chile.

2007  Nancy Pelosi is sworn in as the first female Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, one of the most powerful posts in the U.S. government.

2007  Pratibha Patil is elected as the first woman President of India.

The first all-female UN Peacekeeping unit is deployed. It is made up of over 100 policewomen from Indian and it is sent to Liberia.
Key Dates in International Women’s History

2009  Michelle Obama becomes the first African-American First Lady of the United States. Sonia Sotomayor becomes the first Hispanic, and third woman, to serve as a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

2011  UN Women is formed out of a number of existing UN organizations. UN Women is formed to further the empowerment of women and girls and to advocate for gender equality.

About the UN Foundation

The United Nations Foundation, a public charity was created in 1998 with entrepreneur and philanthropist Ted Turner’s historic $1 billion gift to support UN causes and activities. We build and implement public-private partnerships to address the world’s most pressing problems, and work to broaden support for the UN through advocacy and public outreach. Through innovative campaigns and partnerships, we connect people, ideas, and resources to help the UN solve global problems. The campaigns help reduce child mortality, empower women and girls, create a new energy future, secure peace and human rights, and promote technology innovation to improve health outcomes. These solutions are helping the UN advance the eight global targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For more information, visit www.unfoundation.org.

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