March – International Women’s Day
March 8, 2015

On March 8th, we will mark International Women’s Day – an event with its roots in the labour movement. Through collective bargaining, the labour movement has been central to making equality measures real in lives of average women. Many of the advances that have improved the lives of women began as part of collective agreements negotiated by unions, and were then expanded to cover all workers. This includes maternity/parental leave, child health benefits, childcare provisions, and pay equity. Laws against sexual harassment in the workplace and (perhaps more importantly) changing attitudes towards what was once considered normal behaviour, can be traced directly to the work of unions to improve the lives of its women members.

In 2015, we are marking many significant anniversaries. This year is the 20th anniversary of the UN’s Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on gender equality and the human rights of women and girls everywhere. It is also the 30th anniversary of the equality guarantees in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Unions have been invoking Charter rights and international agreements to push back on anti-labour government actions. We have also been pushing for equality progress at the bargaining table.

Much work remains, of course, and this is a crucial year to hold decision makers accountable, inside and outside of the labour movement.

Unifor is joining with others to push for a federal leaders’ debate on issues women have identified as important. It is astounding that it has been more than 30 years since such a debate has occurred in a federal election. Our leadership has taken action by signing the Up For Debate petition and we encourage you to as well by visiting this link: http://upfordebate.ca/take-action.

Unifor is amplifying the voices of our members who have identified a lack of quality child care as a key barrier to economic equality. Everyone benefits when parents can go to work knowing that their children are safe and well cared for. This election year it is particularly important that women’s voices and experiences are heard.

On International Women’s Day, we will be part of marches and discussions that will be happening around the world. And the day after, we will use this renewed energy and focus to continue our work for gender equality.