

NATION

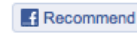
International holiday celebrates women

Day raises awareness of achievements, struggles

By [Zoa Khan](#)

Published on: [Thursday, March 8, 2012](#)

Modified on: [Thursday, March 8, 2012](#)



Today marks the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day as recognized by the United Nations to raise awareness of women's ongoing achievements and struggles around the world.

"This International Women's Day, I join women around the globe in solidarity for human rights, dignity and equality," said Michelle Bachelet, UN Women Executive Director.

Bachelet notes the importance of women's involvement in every aspect of society.

"Women's full and equal participation in the political and economic arena is fundamental to democracy and justice, which people are demanding."

While women make up 50.8 percent of the total US population, according to the US Census Bureau's statistics, only 16.6 percent the US Congress are women.

Bachelet is aware of the gender gap in leadership.

"Yet while tremendous progress has been made, no country can claim to be entirely free from gender-based discrimination. This inequality can be seen in persistent gender wage gaps and unequal opportunities, in low representation of women in leadership in public office and the private sector," said Bachelet.

The gender gap is also present in professional settings.

"Women are half the population but only 15 percent of board members at big American firms, and 10 percent in Europe," said the July 2011 issue of the Economist.

Many European countries are responding to this gender gap by instituting quotas that require companies to the number of women in their boardroom up to 40 percent by 2020.

"The time is now," Bachelet said. "Studies show that higher levels of gender equality correlate positively with higher levels of per capita gross national product. Opening economic opportunities to women would significantly raise economic growth and reduce poverty."

A Forbes business writer, Lisa Quast, suggests that the European boardroom quotas can set an example.

"I applaud the European governments for being so insightful as to realize that for businesses to remain or become globally competitive," Quast wrote in a response to that Economist issue. "They need to equally cultivate female talent. Maybe the rest of the world could learn something from Europe's example."

International Women's Day is an official national holiday in many countries such as Afghanistan, China, Cuba, Mongolia, Nepal, Russia, Uganda, Ukraine, Vietnam, Zambia and more.

Women in these countries have the day off from work to celebrate the holiday. Women are honored through various forms of celebrations that range from flowers and gifts to parades and marches.

Even though the UN highlights that the start of the International Women's Day was in the United States, the US government does not recognize it as a national holiday.

news@thedailycougar.com

