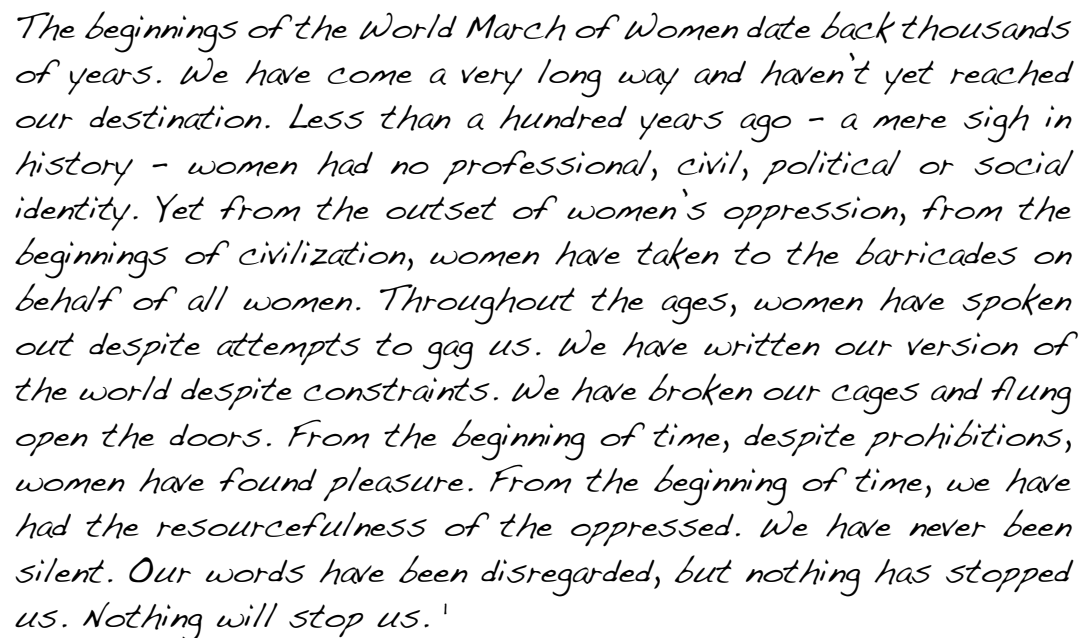




**Women on the *march*
until we are all *free*!**

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN





A large group of women, many wearing white t-shirts and hats, are marching in a parade. They are holding a large white banner that reads "Marche des femmes contre la pauvreté" and "du 26 mai au 4 juin 1995". The banner also features a logo with the letters "R" and "D" and the text "FEMME ET DIALOGUE". The women are holding small flags and some are wearing backpacks. The background shows trees and a clear sky.



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A brief history of the World March of Women



*Women on the **march** until we are all **free!***

*Women of spirit, women of courage,
Women of solidarity
Women at work and women on the march
Women of heart and friendship?*

This brief history of the World March of Women will be told via three watershed moments: the *Bread and Roses March* in 1995 and the actions in 2000 and 2005.



The origin of the World March of Women

It was following the success of the *Bread and Roses March* that the idea of initiating a world march of women to mark the beginning of the 21st century began to germinate in the imaginations of Québec activists and delegates from a number of countries of the South who had come to join in that vast mobilization.

1995

The genesis of the *Bread and Roses March*

On May 26, 1995, in answer to the call launched by the *Fédération des femmes du Québec*, 850 women laced up their shoes and marched to Québec City, demanding... bread and roses. They called on the Québec government to make changes to improve their economic conditions, through nine essential demands. For ten days, three contingents of marchers received massive support from the population. On June 4, 1995, after covering 200 km, the marchers were greeted by a crowd of 15,000 people gathered in front of the Québec National Assembly. The *Bread and Roses March* wrote a page in Québec history.



2 *Pour que ça change*, theme song of the World March of Women (our translation). Lyrics: Judi Richards, Kathia Rock, N'tshukuss Vollant, Janet Lumb, Karen Young and Marie-Hélène Montpetit, in collaboration with Lyne Dallaire and Carolyne Harvey.



*Du pain et des roses
Pour changer les choses
Du pain et des roses
Pour qu'on se repose
Du pain et des roses³*

*(Bread and roses)
(To bring us change)
(Bread and roses)
(To bring us repose)
(Bread and roses)*



Bread and Roses - the origins of the slogan:

The Lawrence textile strike, known as the *Bread and Roses* strike, was led by immigrant women (and probably a few from Québec) in the town of Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912. When the Polish weavers from the Everett Cotton Mills found out that their employer had cut their wages by 32 cents, they shut down the machines and walked out of the mill, shouting “Short pay, short pay!” Women and men working in other factories joined them the next day and within a week, more than 20,000 workers had rallied to the strike. It was during this famous strike that the slogan *Bread and Roses* appeared for the first time on the pickets of the striking women.

Bread for their basic needs and roses for a better quality of life... The 850 marchers, supported by thousands of women, demanded better living conditions and working conditions for themselves, their mothers, their sisters, their friends, their neighbours and for all women.

<i>Trouvons des trouvailles</i>	<i>(Let's find innovative ideas)</i>
<i>Pour que l'on travaille</i>	<i>(So we can work)</i>
<i>Guettons les ghettos</i>	<i>(Keep an eye out for ghettos)</i>
<i>Nous sommes égaux</i>	<i>(We are equals)</i>
<i>Blanches, blondes et brunes</i>	<i>(Our hair may be white, blond or brown)</i>
<i>Nous voulons la lune</i>	<i>(We want the moon)</i>
<i>Rousses, grises et noires</i>	<i>(Red, grey or black)</i>
<i>Nous parlons d'espoir⁴</i>	<i>(We are talking about hope)</i>

This exceptional mobilization was the culmination of various struggles that made it possible to obtain important gains:

- an increase in minimum wage;
- the *Pay Equity Act*;
- reduction of the sponsorship period from 10 years to 3 years for immigrant women sponsored by their spouse.

The *Bread and Roses March* was the spark that ignited a fantastic dream – a march of women worldwide.



³ The song *Du pain et des roses* (our translation). Lyrics by Hélène Pednault, music by Marie-Claire Blais.

⁴ Idem.





2000

A grandiose project launched, like a bottle in the sea

At the end of 1995, a major delegation of the Québec women's movement took part in the NGO Forum on Women in Huairou, parallel to the UN's Fourth World Conference in Beijing, China. It was at this memorable event of international solidarity that the idea of a world march of women was launched by the Québec women, like a bottle in the sea.

A workshop was listed among the many activities. Approximately twenty women responded to the invitation. They came from a number of countries in Asia and Africa, as well as from France, the United States and Canada. Several Québec women (the "marchers") facilitated the workshop, proudly sporting the Bread and Roses March bibs. A video was presented, and the images were worth a thousand words. The astonished participants asked why hundreds of women had marched 200 km on foot. They were told about women's poverty in Québec. The South existed in the North. The demands were explained. An African woman recounted how women in her country had also organized a march. They talked about their gains – tangible gains and disappointments. And above all, they talked about the tightly-knit bonds of solidarity that were forged, kilometre by kilometre...

The idea of this crazy project to organize a world march of women in 2000 was presented to the participants: women from all over the world who would march to denounce the policies of the International Monetary Fund, to demand concrete measures from U.N. member states to put an end to women's poverty. Quite a project! But maybe, if everyone worked on it together... Wasn't it true that all things were possible? Maybe... The project was launched.

*Donnons-nous la main (Give us your hand)
La terre est une femme (The earth is a woman)
Entendez nos âmes (Listen to our souls)
Ne soyez pas sourds (Don't turn a deaf ear)
Nous parlons d'amour⁵ (We're talking about love)*



⁵ The song, *Du pain et des roses* (our translation).



A collective decision

In late September 1995, FFQ members at a general meeting decided to form a working committee mandated to develop the world march of women project. At that meeting, the project didn't get a wildly enthusiastic reception. A number of members needed a breather after the immense mobilization of the *Bread and Roses March*, and thought that it wasn't realistic to engage the FFQ in a project of that magnitude...

At the committee's first meetings, committee members quickly agreed on the need to broaden the demands to encompass violence against women. The proposal submitted for the year 2000 was for a world march of women against poverty and violence. Women's groups all over the world were contacted through Québec's vast network of NGOs involved in international solidarity work. The initial activists were enthusiastic and said, "If ten countries go for it, we're on!"

The response to this call was like a veritable wave unfurling! And at its 1996 annual general meeting, the FFQ made the commitment to bring this project to completion, to the applause of its members. The sceptics were astounded!

Background context

It was in an increasingly "globalized" world that this idea of a world march of women made its way. A world built by the combined force of two global phenomena: perpetuation of a system based on the domination of the most vulnerable – patriarchy; and the predominance of a unique system of economic exploitation – neo-liberal capitalism. These two dominant systems sustain and reinforce one another.⁶ Globalization of the market economy has developed in function of the large corporations and multinationals. It has made a growing number of women poorer, in the North as well as in the South. Poor regions have also witnessed a proliferation of armed conflicts that have had particular ramifications for women and children. Violence against women continues to be a universal reality: spousal violence, sexual assault, sexual mutilation, systematic rape in times of war...



⁶ The World March of Women's set of demands in 2000.



1998: a first international meeting

It was in Montréal on October 18, 1998 that the first international meeting of the World March of Women took place. Dozens of activists worked tirelessly to prepare this extraordinary event. Excitement was running high, not to mention a little anxiety! In two days, we succeeded in adopting a platform of 17 global demands to eliminate poverty and violence against women. And we undertook to organize a world march of women from all corners of the planet in 2000. It was set to begin on March 8, International Women's Day, and end on October 17, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. This historic meeting was what initiated the concrete work of local mobilization for international action!



The World March of Women's actions in the year 2000⁷

2,000 good reasons for marching...

The World March of Women in 2000 will be remembered for a long time to come. In October 2000, 6,000 non-government organizations in 161 countries and territories marched in their villages, their neighbourhoods, their cities and in front of government headquarters. Hundreds of thousands and indeed millions of women and men supported the demands put forward by the World March of Women. In record time (scarcely seven months), 5,084,546 signatures were gathered to demand that political and economic decision-makers radically change course on a world scale, to end poverty and all forms of violence against women, once and for all.



⁷ Source: FFQ press releases, *Quelques pas pour lutter contre la violence faite aux femmes... Mais des miettes pour les personnes pauvres*, October 12, 2000; *Une marche pour imaginer un autre monde*, December 22, 2000



On October 16, 2000, an international delegation of women succeeded in meeting the leaders of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. On October 17, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations in turn met with the delegates, while 10,000 women from every continent demonstrated in the streets of New York. Meetings that were unprecedented, vigorous denunciations by the women, and of course, bureaucratic or smug speeches by the other side...

The results? The following are a few examples of results that have emerged. In certain African countries such as Burkina Faso and Mozambique, the women's national co-ordinating bodies obtained a meeting with government leaders for the first time in their history, in which they were able to present their concerns. In Venezuela, spousal violence was finally recognized as a criminal act. In Morocco, a demonstration in support of the desired changes to the Family Code helped make headway in this area. On October 14, in Brussels, 30,000 women from Western and Eastern Europe finally forged bonds of solidarity. In Indonesia, a caravan of women travelled from island to island to engage the local authorities in discussions, call on them to denounce violence against women, and demand equal rights for all.

And in Québec?

More than 40,000 people, a majority of whom were women, took part in local or regional marches or in the national rally in Montréal on October 14, 2000. It was the largest feminist demonstration ever held in Québec! Seventeen regional committees and 110 local organizations worked tirelessly to organize these actions. On October 14, 1,000 volunteers from various backgrounds set to work. In a number of Cégeps, the themes of poverty and violence against women were studied in humanities and social science courses. Student associations organized information booths. The Québec demands were examined in a host of groups, unions and social movements. Municipalities, CLSCs, professional bodies and even para-governmental councils supported them.

In Abitibi, Châteauguay and Saguenay-Lac St-Jean and on the North Shore, Native and non-Native women of Québec joined together in marches, caravans and cultural activities. In Montréal, hundreds of Quebecers of all backgrounds marched together.

Yet the gains obtained from governments did not measure up to the women's and the FFQ's expectations... not by a long shot. But it wasn't for lack of trying: no matter how many mobilization actions and meetings between the Québec government and the FFQ were held, the responses to the 21 demands were disappointing! A few steps were taken to combat violence against women... but mere crumbs were offered for women grappling with poverty!

There was moderate satisfaction with the financial support offered for resource groups working with women victims of sexual violence and for the awareness campaign on various facets of violence against women. The budget allotment for immigrant women studying French and for the various committees working on issues relating to violence against women and discrimination against sex workers was also favourably received.



Certain responses were either very evasive or clearly insufficient. Shelters witnessed a slight increase in their budgets, but not enough to meet the real needs of women who are victims of spousal violence. There were no concrete measures offered to make schooling more accessible for students with children or for those who study part-time. There was nothing to ensure that mothers who stay home to look after their young children full-time had access to a pension plan that would protect them from poverty when they retired. Nothing to reduce the period of sponsorship from ten years to three years for all immigrants.⁸ We obtained a bill on equal access to employment that, although a step in the right direction, failed to recognize the existence of specific problems facing visible minorities, Aboriginal persons and handicapped persons. A commitment was made to integrate the family policy within the set of social policies, but no increase was provided in family allowances, not even for poor families. Even electoral promises for social housing were not fully respected. Women's centres received no increase in their budgets. The 10¢ increase in minimum wage did not even allow workers to make up the purchasing power they had lost over the two preceding years. And the height of indecency: this increase was scheduled to take effect only on February 1, 2001! The women's movement vigorously denounced this vastly insufficient measure that kept a good number of individuals and their families in poverty. For welfare recipients, the government didn't even announce any indexation for the subsequent year. It thereby opted to condemn thousands of people to abject poverty. It turned a deaf ear to all our arguments for an increase in benefits and a basic minimum amount.



In Québec, the World March of Women was a success that surpassed our expectations: an impressive mobilization, excellent media coverage and a vast popular education campaign on poverty and violence experienced by women. The development of an international feminist consciousness for Quebeckers! Women from diverse backgrounds networking! Those were our greatest gains!

A second global action: the Women's Global Charter for Humanity

At the fourth international meeting of the World March in New Delhi, India in March 2003, the delegates decided to organize a global action in 2005. A Women's Global Charter for Humanity was drafted, in continuity with the 17 demands.

⁸ In 1995, we obtained a shorter sponsorship period for women sponsored by their husbands. In 2000, we wanted to extend this gain to all immigrants



Our desire to jointly devise a Women's Global Charter for Humanity reflected the urgency of proposing alternative economic, political, social and cultural alternatives to make another world possible. We proclaimed loud and clear that it was indeed possible to build a world founded on equality between women and men, between all human beings and among all peoples, based on respect for our planetary environment!

After a process of consultation and collective writing that lasted a year and a half, with the participation of dozens of groups from all regions of the world, the Charter was adopted at the 5th International Meeting of the World March of Women (WMW) on December 10, 2004 in Kigali, Rwanda.

The Women's Global Charter describes the world that women wish to build, based on 5 values and 31 affirmations. In this world, exploitation, oppression, intolerance and exclusion are abolished, and integrity, diversity and the rights and freedoms of all women and all men are respected. This world hinges on five values: equality, freedom, solidarity, justice and peace.

The drafting of the Women's Global Charter for Humanity clearly illustrates the effort made by the World March to reflect the diversity of the participating groups. It necessitated numerous discussions, and many sentences had to be reworked to accurately translate the ideas uniting the women. All had to attune to one another and go forward together. A number of versions were drafted and submitted to the groups participating in the World March, for comments. Each country gave its analyses and expressed its sensibilities, until the Charter was ultimately approved in Kigali.





2005 Women's Global Charter for Humanity

Five years after the initial success of the international action in 2000, another series of mobilizations were organized around the world in 2005. The world relay of the Women's Global Charter for Humanity was launched on March 8 in São Paulo, Brazil, with 30,000 women in the streets. The relay travelled through 53 countries and territories on five continents and ended in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on October 17 the same year. All along the way, actions were organized regionally and in border zones. Women from a number of countries, some of which were involved in conflicts, mobilized together.

At every stop, the women organized information/awareness activities and presented the Charter. They engaged allied movements in discussion about the necessity of collectivizing struggles. They called on their governments to get involved.

In each country, women created a section of a patchwork quilt. Dozens of patches stitched together formed the world solidarity quilt. This collective work illustrates the values put forward by the women, which they inscribed in the Women's Global Charter for Humanity.

The Women's Global Charter welcomed in Québec City

In Québec City on May 7, 2005, 15,000 people – women, men and children – were there to welcome the Women's Global Charter for Humanity, which arrived by ferry from Lévis, accompanied by international delegates. "We are the mothers of this Charter, we the mothers of humanity, and through this Charter, we affirm our commitment to create a better world," proclaimed Safiétou Diop, a delegate from Senegal, as she set foot on solid ground.





Following a mass march headed by a Native woman through the winding streets of Québec City, the Women's Global Charter for Humanity was passed from hand to hand by more than 2,000 women, all deeply moved, and brought before the Québec National Assembly. Through this action, the women's movement reiterated its struggles, celebrated its victories and above all proclaimed the changes that are needed to fully actualize the Charter's values of **equality, freedom, solidarity, justice and peace** in Québec and around the world.

The following Québec demands inspired by the Charter's five values were put forward:

- **equality**, through a global policy on the status of women and preservation of the *Conseil du statut de la femme* and the *Secrétariat à la condition féminine*;
- **freedom**, through an agreement with the federal government to protect migrant women who are victims of human trafficking;
- **solidarity**, through measures to ensure that the essential needs of welfare recipients and students receiving loans and bursaries are covered;
- **justice**, by ending disparities in working conditions for atypical workers and for people on workforce integration measures;
- **peace**, through a major education/awareness campaign over a 10-year period, to eradicate violence against women.⁹

⁹ For more information, see the presentation of the Québec demands for the WMW on the FFQ website: www.ffq.qc.ca



The government response to our demands was disappointing. For example, in response to our demand to organize a major education/awareness campaign to eradicate violence against women, the government's plan of action on spousal violence was invoked, which had been adopted in December 2004. For the demand on equality, the response was to point to existing work on the concept of equality and to measures already set in place for a number of years through various programmes. We continued to push this demand and won the government over in 2007. No answer has been given to our demand to cover the essential needs of those whose earnings are based on income security or the loans and bursaries programme. However, some headway has been made on the question of atypical work and the rights of migrant women who are victims of human trafficking.

An irreversible movement!

The two peak periods of global action in 2000 and 2005 were prime times for mobilizing women, cementing new alliances and spearheading new struggles.

The World March of Women has become a global movement of feminist action rallying grassroots organizations and groups working to eliminate the root causes of poverty and violence against women. It is an irreversible movement to combat all forms of inequality and discrimination against women.

Women will be on the march until we are all free!



***Women on the **march**
until we are all **free!*****





2010 Global actions around the world

In October 2008, the 7th International Meeting of the World March of Women took place in Galicia, Spain, ten years after the 1st international meeting. One hundred and thirty-six women delegates from 48 national co-ordinating bodies all over the world took part in this meeting and decided on the actions to be organized in 2010. These actions will hinge on four main spheres of action: ¹⁰

- work – economic autonomy;
- the common good — food sovereignty — access to resources;
- violence;
- peace and demilitarization.

March 8 will be the kick-off date for international actions in 2010. We will be on the march from March 8 until October 17, in keeping with climate conditions. In Québec, following a survey conducted with the members of the Québec co-ordinating body for the World March of Women, it was agreed that we would march for five days, from October 12 to October 17. To wrap up the march, WMW delegates from five continents will converge in the Democratic Republic of Congo on October 17. At the same time, actions will be held everywhere in the world, attesting to our solidarity with all women who are living in countries involved in conflicts.

In 2010, we are continuing our march, answering the call of the World March of Women. And once again, we are calling on the Québec government, demanding concrete measures to end poverty and violence. We will remind our MNAs of their responsibilities as managers of the common good, by demanding that they put an end to privatization of health care, education, water, and wind energy. How can we accept the fact that in Québec, a woman who works hard 40 hours a week continues to live in poverty? Earning \$9 an hour since May 1st, when she should have been earning \$10.66! This problem affects 325,000 workers, the majority of whom are women. When will there be a genuine increase in minimum wage? Every day, women on welfare are confronted with fundamental questions and decisions that are fraught with consequences: how to pay the rent? The heating bill? How to find money to clothe the family? How to feed the children? How to feed themselves? These women must also face increasingly burdensome prejudices. How can a government that has promised to fight poverty justify the welfare categories of “fit” or “unfit”? Isn’t every person entitled to a decent income? We have a duty to express our indignation and react. Putting an end to these welfare categories is an urgent measure! To take action to eradicate violence against women, we have to demand egalitarian and non-sexist courses on sexuality, and legislation on advertising. Moreover, we have to demand that the government prohibit military recruitment in educational institutions in Québec. Lastly, we have to demand the immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops in Afghanistan if we want to live in a world at peace.

¹⁰ Reference: Strategic Plan, adopted at the 6th International Meeting of the WMW in Lima, Peru, July 2006, www.marchemondialedesfemmes.org





It is high time for the Québec government to shake off its inertia and genuinely fight poverty and violence against women!

Why are we still on the march?

If in the year 2000 we had 2,000 good reasons to march, in 2010 we have every reason in the world to mobilize with women from all over the planet.

We women have been marching a long time to denounce and demand an end to the oppression of women and end the domination, exploitation, egotism and unbridled quest for profit breeding injustice, war, conquest and violence. Our feminist struggles and those of our foremothers on every continent have forged new freedoms for us, our daughters and sons, and all the young girls and boys who will walk the earth after us.

We are building a world where diversity is considered an asset and individuality a source of richness; where dialogue flourishes and where writing, song and dreams can flower. In this world, human beings are considered one of the most precious sources of wealth. Equality, freedom, solidarity, justice, and peace are its driving force. We have the power to create this world.

We represent over half of humanity. We give life, we work, love, create, struggle, and have fun. We currently accomplish most of the work essential to life and the continued survival of humankind. Yet our place in society continues to be undervalued. [...]

We propose to build another world where exploitation, oppression, intolerance and exclusion no longer exist, and where integrity, diversity and the rights and freedoms of all are respected. [...]

With this Women's Global Charter for Humanity and our upcoming actions, we reaffirm that another world is possible, a world filled with hope and life that is truly a fine place to live. We proclaim our love of the world, its diversity and its beauty.¹¹



Photos: Chantal Locat

¹¹ Women's Global Charter for Humanity, excerpts from the Preamble and conclusion





Since the 1995 *Bread and Roses March* and the World March of Women in 2000 and 2005, we have been marching to end poverty and violence against women.

We are union activists, students, activists in women's groups and community groups, and we are feminists!

We are women working in public services and in the private sector, and we are mobilizing to maintain quality public services that are accessible to the entire population. Public services are important for everyone's quality of life and are essential for women's participation on the labour market.

We are different and we are alike. Together, multifaceted and pluralistic, we are continuing our actions to speed up the much too halting process of achieving women's equality and autonomy.

We have the strength that comes from raising our voices as one – voices speaking out on behalf of all women. We are engaged in building a world based on the values of the Women's Global Charter for Humanity - a world of equality, freedom, solidarity, justice and peace!

With women all over the world, we form a long chain of solidarity. And we are pursuing our march, the World March of Women! We are on the move toward our next global rendez-vous: 2010!

Women will be on the march until we are all free!



***Women on the march
until we are all free!***

