

Still a long way to go ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

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In 1910, more than 100 women from 17 countries gathered in Copenhagen to vote in favour of a Women's Day. A hundred years later, it feels like by now women should be a lot closer to true equality than we are.

Too often, it's a case of two steps forward, one back. In the last few weeks Canada's female Olympians, who have few other athletic competitions open to them, poured their hearts into the Vancouver Games. They dazzled their country by winning the lion's share of a historic number of medals.

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How are women doing overall? Not great. Women make up 70 per cent of the world's estimated 1.2 billion poor, according to the United Nations. Women do 66 per cent of the world's work, produce 50 per cent of its food, but earn only 10 per cent of global wealth and own only one per cent of property.

While the average wage gap worldwide was under 20 per cent, in Japan in 2006 women earned only 51 per cent as much as men.

The United Nations also reports that women are concentrated in job sectors that are badly paid and offer few protections.

In the undeveloped world, honour killings, female infanticide, genital mutilation, bride killings, and sex trafficking add an extra layer of horror to women's lives.

In developed countries, there has been undeniable progress. Women have crowded into universities and the professions, a majority working full-time while raising families.

But the fact is that even in countries where women have made enormous progress, their advancement has stopped short of equality. All those degrees, all those long hours at the office were supposed to lead to equality - of opportunity, pay, and advancement.

While they wait, women keep hearing that their turn will come: Once there are enough of us "in the pipeline," the most talented and driven among us will become CEOs and board members.

But that's just wishful thinking, new research by Catalyst Inc. has found. Catalyst, a group working to expand opportunities for women in business, tracked more than 4,100 graduates of elite MBA schools around the world, to find that with no difference in ambition or skills or devotion to family, women no matter where they were in the world were hired at a lower level than men, paid less than them - and never

caught up.

There seems little point waiting for government to legislate correctives. Barely 22 per cent of MPs in Canada are women. Around the world, women hold an average of 18.4 per cent of seats in national assemblies. Who in male-dominated legislatures answers to the world's women?

A hundred years ago, women argued that it was necessary to make Parliament more democratic by extending the franchise to women.

Franchise in hand for nearly a century, it's time women used Parliament to make their lives more democratic. First, they must run for office.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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