

Good Morning learners and staff.

Today I'm going to be speaking to you about why it is important to commemorate Women's Day in South Africa.

On the 9th of August 1956, 20 000 women marched in solidarity to the Union Buildings in Pretoria as a protest against Apartheid pass laws. Since 1994, the 9th of August has been known as Women's Day in South Africa and is celebrated to commemorate not only the march and those who took part in it but also all ordinary South African women who continue to contribute towards the development of our country.

Why was this march so important though? Why can't we simply celebrate South African women without having to re-tell the same story year after year?

The answer is given in a phrase someone once told me: "If you only look forwards without looking backwards, you're not really looking anywhere."

That sentence may seem a bit philosophical and meaningless on the surface, however it actually contains a very important message.

Where would women be today without the courageous activists who came before us? The fighters who paved the way for our development within society.

The 1956 Women's Day march was trailblazing in terms of showcasing how impactful united women could be and what a great difference they could make in the struggle. This idea was perfectly captured in the protest song sung by the women during the march which roughly translated to the now iconic phrase "you strike a woman, you strike a rock." Every year we celebrate this event in history because it represents and reminds us of the strength and power of women. Something which we're going to need a lot of if we're going to continue to fight for gender equality.

Yes, there has been a lot of success regarding women's rights, but we are still very far away from true equality.

At the moment there is an atmosphere of change within our society. This past year has shown a surge of mutual support for resisters (I'm sure you all heard about the Harvey Weinstein case in Hollywood) and in the face of Trump, one of the most unbelievably prejudiced and biased leaders in history, people have banded together to protest his rule. Now is the time for increased unity between women and all allies to their cause. Minority groups need to back each other in order to become strong enough to fight injustice. I'm not talking about girl power or support for only mainstream groups of underprivileged people. I'm talking about intersectional feminism – which unites everyone who is forced to face bias or prejudice within their everyday lives. Feminism isn't only about being a woman anymore and it doesn't only apply to women either. It's about equality for everyone and all parts of who they are. People aren't one dimensional – we belong to so many different sectors and it's important to acknowledge and support all of them.

I know this seems like a lot to fight for and that it's scary to face such a huge challenge. But that's when you can look backwards – at the activists who came before you. Be inspired by their courage and let their strength help you when it's time for you to look forwards again.

To end off I would like to share with you a poem I wrote specifically about female activists of the past, present and future. I think it perfectly encapsulates the sexist society in which we continue to live, and I hope it inspires you.

I am a woman

everyday
you try to enclose me;
wrap me up in 'for my own good' and 'knowing my place'
letting invisible forces called Money and Man
tear at me until I'm nothing but the loose threads of a tightly woven history...
ready to be reworked into something more convenient,
for you
is my body not the right shape for you?
are the hips which birthed a nation too big for your designer jeans?
I may seem only soft
and supple
but don't be fooled by my curves – they are just as sharp as the tongue you use to yell slurs
at me when I walk down the street
I am strong
strong because of the women who came before me – the ones who passed down
the natural resistance which pumps through my veins,
who taught me to stand up, speak up
Your Time
is up:
my voice is too loud to be spoken over,
my head too filled with knowledge to be bowed in submission,
my body too valuable to be working twice as hard to earn 23% less!
I am more than your prejudices and stereotypes;
I am a woman
with bones made of fire and a spirit too powerful to be contained
I will fight for what I deserve and continue fighting for all my sisters who can't
because I am a woman

Thank you. 😊