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Happy IWD. (Clara Zetkin) and thanks to PD, Carla and EN

I am immensely grateful that we have this day, just as I am immensely grateful for Earth Day, to celebrate the incredible women past and present, some of whom we know and most who are buried in history written by men.

I wonder what the world would be like today if women had not continued to resist against so many odds, to write, to paint, to imagine, to campaign, to lead the environmental movement on so many fronts?

Why does this all matter?

Firstly because it is a matter of fairness. The poly-crisis affects all of humanity, not just half.

But the perspectives on, and decisions about, how to tackle it have been made mainly by men – and too often men from the global north.

There are problems with the patriarchy. As I get older I see it increasingly as the root cause of so much that is broken, it's an ideology based on hierarchical power achieved by any means.

And ideologies are powered by culture.

We will continue to pay an impossibly high price if we continue to exclude cultural work led by women. I cannot over emphasize this point. Cultural values rooted in care, love and connection are overwhelmingly represented by women.

Women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, particularly in vulnerable communities. Women bear the brunt of environmental crises, yet our voices remain marginalized.

The UN estimates of those displaced by climate change, 80% are women and that violence against women and girls increases in disaster settings often caused by resource scarcity, weather impacts and the inevitable conflict that follows – in other words, Climate change.

Climate justice – which is essential if we are to meet the climate crisis - is thus intrinsically tied to gender equality. And it follows that gender equality is tied to cultural values - led by women.

Women are not just passive victims of climate change; they are powerful agents of change. Women are proven better leaders in times of crisis

When empowered during disaster and emergency response planning, women bring the knowledge, skills and values of care that enable communities to recover faster.

A study of 194 countries found that pandemic responses were systematically better in women-led countries. And that Covid-19 deaths were lower in states with a woman governor.

We know that women in power improves society

Countries become greener, local economies grow, children are healthier, and education levels improve—all of which are foundations for a more sustainable future. Where women have higher social and political status, their countries have 12% lower CO2 emissions

And here, in the context of cultural heritage, the contribution of indigenous cultural knowledge holders is at last being recognised.

Over 80% of the remaining biodiversity is within the lands of Indigenous peoples who have protected them for generations, many of which have matriarchal structures. Through their traditional roles as healers, culture-keepers, and caretakers of water and land, Indigenous women and women in the Global South have enduring and deep knowledge of nature.

This wisdom can significantly contribute to resilience, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and protecting the natural world.

And let's not forget, Women have led the climate movement. Rachel Carson's seminal book, *Silent Spring*, inspired a generation of grassroots action for the Earth, and we know women Lyn Margulis, Wangari Mathaii, Elinor Ostrom, Jane Goodall, Vandana Shiva, Rigoberta Menchu, Sylvia Earle, LaDonna Brave Bull Allard , Sonya Guadajara and so on, the list is long and growing.

We owe our deep gratitude to these extraordinary courageous women, our Foremothers of Protecting Nature

Finally, It was Women who created the framework to limit global temperature rise

The Paris Climate Agreement would not be what it is today without women. A legendary group of climate leaders called the "lionesses," including Christiana Figueres, Farhaa Yamin and Tessa Tennant met in the Scottish countryside and came up with the guiding principle of 'net zero emissions' at a time when many parties to the climate convention were stuck in disagreements.

It was a campaign group that I belong to – She Changes Climate – that led the protests after the Cop29 global climate change summit announced an organising committee of 28 men and no women.

So many women have pioneered the sweet spot between culture and climate, artists Cecilia Vicuña, ruth Asawa. Yoko Ono, marina Abramovic, heather Ackroyd, Monica Choo, Katie Mitchell, and so on. Including my own company, Julie's Bicycle, which is led by women and always has been.

Culture rooted in feminine values optimises our capacity for emotional as well as practical resilience. These values are the backbone of cultural intelligence, and are absolutely critical for climate action. Women are lovingly filling our cultural landscapes, countering the difficult linear, singular and often bullying culture valorised by so-called strong men particularly in politics. But culture - The arts, heritage and creative industries, rooted in love, trust, service and the knowledge that we are all profoundly connected, is perhaps the most powerful response to our collective challenges today.

This is why I believe so strongly in culture-based climate action.

Include culture values in the COP climate negotiations and we support gender parity for women and girls, crafting and stewarding values of care and nourishment that are so desperately needed. Cultural perspectives, experiences, and solutions led by women are crucial for climate action.

Of course we shouldn't need International Women's Day but I am really going to enjoy it.

Thank you

