

Let's keep the conversation going

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March 8, 2016, recognized International Women's Day — a day to celebrate women's contributions to our communities, our country, and world. It was also a time to reflect on progress toward equality for women and to reflect on the significant challenges that remain.

Now, we must keep this conversation going.

Canada's theme for International Women's Day 2016 — Women's Empowerment Leads to Equality — recognized the need to

empower women and girls as we work together to achieve gender equality. Without empowerment there can be no equality

We need to do more to support equality as evidenced by the 35 per cent of women worldwide who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, or the 24 per cent less that women earn compared to men doing the same work. We need to support and empower women, who currently represent only 22 per cent of all parliamentarians around the world.

We need to do more, celebrate more, and reflect on progress

made. We need to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by women who have played an incredible role in the history of their countries and communities, large and small.

For Canadians, empowerment is celebrating the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in 2016; it's celebrating Katie Telford as the second female chief of staff for a sitting Prime Minister; it's achieving gender balance in cabinet. Empowerment is celebrating local women doing extraordinary things, like the work of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre; or recognizing the

40th anniversary of the Pictou County Women's Resource & Sexual Assault Centre; and the advocacy and support provided by LEA Place Women's Resource Centre in Sheet Harbour.

When women and girls are empowered, they can fulfill their potential and contribute their best to our communities and our society.

Let's work together and keep the conversation going to empower women, so our region and country can thrive in the 21st century.

Sean Fraser is the MP for Central Nova.