



President of the Republic of Slovenia

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Address by the President at the event to mark 8 March,
International Women's Day**

Check against delivery.

President of the National Assembly Ms Urška Klakočar Zupančič,
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Ms Tanja Fajon,
Minister of Culture Ms Asta Vrečko,
Minister for Health Ms Valentina Prevolnik Rupel,
Human Rights Ombudsman Mr Peter Svetina,
President of the Court of Auditors Ms Jana Ahčin,
Advocate of the Principle of Equality Mr Miha Lobnik,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the celebration of 8 March, International Women's Day. Our event today is an opportunity to reflect on the achievements and challenges in the field of gender equality. Plato wrote that if women are expected to do the same work as men, they must be taught the same things as men, but his disciple Aristotle already characterised women as inferior and subordinate to men – men are the ones who rule and women are the ones who obey. Although we have seen progress and shifts towards a fairer society through the years of efforts made by feminist movements, from calls for women's equality at work and the rights to vote and to decide on abortion, it is still, or yet again, crucial to stand up for women's rights and dignity. And this every day, not just on 8 March.

In 1977, the United Nations General Assembly declared 8 March Women's Rights and International Peace Day. In 1945, the UN was the first international organisation to enshrine the principle of gender equality as a basic human right in its Charter.

Yet poverty unfortunately still has a feminine face.

Despite legislation providing for equal pay for equal work, the gender pay gap still persists. Women often earn less than men for the same work. In 2022, Slovenia got its first female President of the National Assembly, its first female Foreign Minister and its first female President of the Republic, yet women are still under-represented in leadership positions, including in politics, where we still face gender stereotypes, even openly, in public, in full view of everyone. This limits the influence and the opportunities for advancement of society as a whole. Physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence against women is a serious social problem. Strengthening zero tolerance to violence in society, enhancing trust in state institutions through effective action and eliminating secondary victimisation are key steps to protect victims and prevent violence against women, which is a reflection of unequal power relations.

Therefore eliminating inequalities between the position of women and men in society is an essential step in preventing violence and ensuring fundamental human rights to all members of society.

It is also important to highlight all this in the international context. The number of wars around the world has been greatly increasing, and there is virtually no international organisation that has not noted that with every conflict, women are the most frequent victims of violence. The fact is that, of the more than 30,000 people who have died in Gaza, most are women and children. And at present, the United Nations is informing us of the well-founded suspicion that Hamas is carrying out violence against women hostages. In many wars, including this one, as well as in the wars in Ukraine, Sudan and many other places, rape is used by the warring parties as part of a military strategy. Women's hardships and traumas do not end when the guns fall silent. Gender equality also includes the equal sharing of childcare, household chores and care for the elderly. Women still face discrimination at work, whether because of pregnancy, motherhood or stereotypes about our abilities.

In recent years, we can read and see the rise of movements and attitudes against gender theory, against gender equality policies and against feminism. This is also a reality in Slovenia. Traditional roles and expectations still, or again, influence the division of family responsibilities. Every individual has the right to his or her own opinion and views, which he or she can express in a peaceful manner. However, as President, I will always strive for and provide unwavering support to the rights of the LGBT community, women's reproductive rights, feminism and gender equality policies.

International Women's Day is therefore also an opportunity to underline the necessity of feminism, which is not just a movement for women's rights and is not directed against men, is not a matter of angry women, but is a fight for justice, equality and freedom for all people, regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, or other identities. It seeks to create a more inclusive, fair and equal society.

Especially today, when we are facing challenges such as the interference in reproductive rights (the fact is that there are more than 250,000 women in Slovenia without a gynaecologist of their choice), when we can read the results of the ICCS 2022 international civic education survey, in which 48% of students in Slovenia agreed that men are better qualified to be political leaders than women and more than 30% agreed that women should not be involved in politics. These frightening results show that students are less supportive of equality and gender equality than they were in previous years, which is why feminism along with a feminist foreign policy are still crucial today, as they oppose existing injustices and build bridges between individuals and communities, promoting dialogue and enhancing the basis for change where everyone has equal opportunities and rights.

Only through active engagement can we create a fairer, more respectful and compassionate world for all. Above all, it is important that we raise our children in this way. As Bell Hooks or Gloria Jean Watkins, the poet and feminist activist, wrote, we must learn from the past and act for the future so that we can become who we are – so that we can all live lives where we love justice, where we all live in peace. Feminism is for everyone.

That is why I am also looking forward to today's debate and to talking with interesting interlocutors about the status of women through the prism of the present moment. I would like to particularly thank Prof. Dr Milica Antić Gaber, Lucija Karnelutti, Dr Janez Markeš and Mark Podgornik Verdev for their participation in this debate.

On the occasion of this event, we will also open the exhibition I announced a year ago – "Let us recognise knowledge and competence in politics". The photographs you will see in this exhibition carry a strong message, with a desire for society to focus on actions that are rooted in values, on our achievements, and not on outward appearances dictated by imposed ideals of beauty. As the author of the exhibition says – only real beauty is real, or only real beauty can be real. Not imagined. Not invented. That which originates within ourselves. That which pours out from ourselves. From our souls. From our bodies. From the awareness of who we really are. I would like to also thank all my participating female colleagues who were willing to step in front of the camera without make-up, as well as the photographer Jernej Jelen.

I wish you all a wonderful day and may the message of 8 March be with us every single day.