

# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS DAY

## FONDEMOS' VIEW:



Femena

## Today is International Women's Rights Day.

On this important occasion, we want to return to the too often overlooked reality that women are not only victims of authoritarianism and conflict, but they are also among **the main architects of democratic resistance and community recovery**. Across the world, women are disproportionately targeted by repression. Sexual violence is one of the most visible forms, but intimidation, arbitrary detention, and forced displacement are frequently used to silence women activists and weaken collective movements.

Yet, despite being among the first targets of violence, women

**struggle to access decision-making spaces**, especially in political institutions and peacebuilding efforts.

For the gap is striking. As of 12 September 2025, women lead only 29 countries worldwide, out of almost 200. Furthermore, globally, 111 States have parliaments where women represent less than 30% of members. These numbers reveal a structural imbalance: **women often play a central role in civic mobilisation and community protection but remain excluded when power is redistributed**.

And yet, the evidence is clear, **women's participation is not just symbolic but above all transformative**. There is a correlation between women leadership and improved democratic governance. In post-conflict settings where quotas rapidly increase women's representation (e.g. Rwanda exceeding 50% of women Members of Parliament), cross-national survey evidence shows that higher women's representation is associated with higher public trust in parliament, one key marker of institutional legitimacy. In peacebuilding, **women's involvement is also associated with more durable outcomes**. Research compiled by UN Women finds that peace processes with women's implication are linked to a 20% higher probability of agreements lasting at least two years, and a 35% higher probability of lasting fifteen years.

Their crucial role is visible in recent democratic struggles. In **Iran, the "Woman, Life, Freedom"** movement emerged as a decentralised uprising, largely coordinated

through social media despite internet restrictions. Women led peaceful demonstrations followed by students and youth, turning streets, schools, universities, and public transport into spaces of civil disobedience. The movement was explicitly rooted in women's rights and met with heavy repression through policing, surveillance, and judicial persecution.

In **Belarus**, after the disputed 2020 election, women became the face and the infrastructure of protest. Opposition leadership was embodied by figures such as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Maria Kalesnikava, and Veronika Tsepikalo, **who received the Sakharov Prize alongside the rest of the opposition in 2020**, while grassroots mobilisation developed unique repertoires of action, including the now well-known "women's chains of solidarity".

*At Fondemos, we believe that International Women's Rights Day is not just a moment of celebration, but also a call to action. Democracy and peace cannot be built without women. It is time to establish mechanisms and funding so that women's voices are heard and their leadership is fully integrated into the processes that shape our future.*

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a capacity to translate complexity into intelligible choices, to build legitimacy through explanation and coherence, and to make strength compatible with restraint. Their leadership is also inclusive by design: it relies on **coalition-building, institutional credibility, and attention to the social fabric**, because durable decisions are those that society can understand and own.

In a world where women remain central to civic mobilisation yet are still too often absent when power is redistributed, these trajectories remind us that **representation is not symbolic: it expands the repertoire of leadership itself.**

These women show that leadership can mean setting direction, protecting democratic norms, and delivering results while keeping the door open to dialogue and collective buy-in: the kind of transformative participation Fondemos calls for.

Their impact does not stem from women being exceptions, but from **institutions remaining unequal**; widening access to leadership is therefore not only about fairness, but about **strengthening democratic legitimacy and institutional resilience.**



*Kaja Kallas*

Kaja Kallas, Christine Lagarde and Claudia Sheinbaum each illustrate a form of leadership that **challenges the old reflex that authority must look like domination.**

In very different arenas (security and diplomacy for Kallas, monetary governance for Lagarde, and national executive power for Sheinbaum) **they project stature and strength without aggressiveness.**

Their firmness is anchored in purpose, clarity, and accountability rather than intimidation. What they share is



*Claudia Sheinbaum*



*Christine Lagarde*