

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

March 8, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on International Women's Day, we pause to celebrate the advances we have made as a society in advancing women's equality, and it is the day we take stock of the inequality that persists and rededicate our resolve for improvement.

A lot of improvement still needs to be made. A quick glance at employment occupation and income figures for the NWT shows that the rate of employment for women and men are about the same, but the rewards of pay, the inclusion in higher-paying occupation, and the proportion of sexes in senior positions are anything but equal.

Mr. Speaker, let's take a look in the pay envelope. On average, university-educated women make almost 20 per cent less annually than men with degrees. Women with high school diplomas make 10 per cent less than men with the same education, and there is more. While women are more likely to have degrees or diplomas and might be expected to have a higher rate of employment in occupations requiring advanced education or to be equally represented in high-paying trades, the fact is they are not. They remain predominantly represented in the lower-paid occupations, many of them low-paid for being so-called "women's work."

So what is to be done? In Iceland they say, "Equality won't happen by itself." They are getting tough on the gender gulf in earnings. There has been an equal pay law in Iceland since 1961, but women were still making up to 20 per cent less than men for equivalent work, so Iceland passed a better law. Within four years from now, any public or private body in Iceland employing more than 25 people that has not been independently certified as paying equal wages for work of equal value will face daily fines. France has introduced a similar law.

In the NWT, we have no similar protections for all workers, and, although the GNWT is protected by an Equal Pay Commissioner complaint system, I have seen no effort to promote or market this safeguard. Annual reports blandly observe that nobody is complaining.

Mr. Speaker, yet gender equality is a right established by a United Nations convention. Fulfilling this right is the best chance we have in meeting some of the most pressing challenges of our time.

Mr. Speaker, from economic crises and lack of healthcare to climate change, violence against women, and escalating conflicts, women are not only more affected by these problems, women possess ideas and leadership to solve them. The gender discrimination still holding too many women back holds our world back, too. For me, International Women's Day remains a bittersweet celebration, but a celebration nonetheless. Please join me and my sole female Legislative Assembly colleague in commemorating this day. Mahsi.