



Le Réseau des femmes

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LET'S TAKE A STAND!

The Women's Network, held on April 27, 2017, in Drummondville marked the Intersyndicale des femmes' 40th anniversary. The second day of the meeting was devoted to this historical event, as Line Larocque, Political Officer for the Status of Women Sector, mentioned in her opening statement.

By standing as one, we will walk together towards even greater equality between women and men!

THE NETWORK AT A GLANCE

Since the Intersyndicale des femmes was holding a meeting on April 28, 2017, the Status of Women Sector decided to take the opportunity to invite the Women's Network activists to meet the day before to exchange ideas on the theme of *Taking a Stand With Concrete Actions*. It was also an occasion for the convention committee to meet the Network members and have them participate in a consultation it was holding with various FIQ committees.

Moreover, the activists got to see the outcome of discussions they held during a Network lunch in March 2017. During the activity, they were asked to reflect on the challenges of balancing work, family and union activism, and to suggest concrete actions that would make it easier for more women to get involved. The Status of Women Sector will take these highly pertinent suggestions into consideration as it continues its work on the place of women at the FIQ.

The FIQ, which represents mostly women healthcare professionals, has played an important role in fighting for greater equality between women and men. These battles have often been led in solidarity with other labour organizations. Union activists have worked together to develop common visions for life and work conditions for their members and all Quebec women. Thanks to the engagement of these women from diverse backgrounds, the Intersyndicale des femmes was able to make gains and gain more ground with some demands.

There's still work to be done. Now more than ever it is essential that the Women's Network activists continue to take the floor in debates to defend healthcare professionals' demands, at work and in their daily lives. This is why we prepared an activity to help them take a stronger, more confident stand at the microphone. The convention committee also organized a consultation with the members. It was a day to underline the importance of taking a stand as an activist and as Women's Network within the Federation.

Line Larocque





TAKING A STAND WITH CONCRETE ACTIONS

Last April, the Intersyndicale des femmes¹ celebrated *40 years of solidarity and fighting for equality*. Members of women networks from every organization were invited to participate in this historical event. After an overview of the main struggles, since 1977, to improve the personal and professional lives of women, the members were asked to reflect on a gender-based analysis.

The members of the FIQ's Women's Network met the day before to discuss how important it is to *take a stand as activists in the name of equality*.



A quick look at the context

At the microphone:

1. Kathleen Bertrand, CIUSSS du Nord-de-l'île-de-Montréal
2. Isabelle Trépanier, CHU de Québec

Following a brief presentation on a few of the current context's components, the Women's Network activists were prompted to mobilize. Times are tough for women's rights. There are obstacles and steps backwards. Neoliberal globalization continues to wreak havoc by encouraging increasing social inequality, especially when it comes to privatizing and decreasing public services. When governments cut back on public services, women pay the highest price: budget cuts and austerity measures make their economic situation even more precarious.

With an increase in poverty and violence, we need to mobilize. We're seeing it all over the planet wherever women are starting to come together to denounce unacceptable situations, for example in Poland over the issue of abortion, in Argentina over the issue of violence against women, etc.

So, where do the FIQ activists come in? Considering the current context, it would be good for them to mobilize as well. There are several ways to go about it. At the network meeting, we suggested one type of mobilization: *Take a stand* in debates about equality and *take a stand* as a Women's Network to gain greater influence within the organization. In other words, we would like them to be ready to speak to the importance of inequality issues during the many debates that are sure to come up in the current political climate—at the convention, federal councils or within various committees.

WORKSHOP

There's nothing better than a practical activity to help the activists take the floor and stand strong as members of the Women's Network. Members were asked to build their own arguments based on three fictional scenarios and then voice them at the microphone as if they were at a real meeting. The goal of the exercise was to convince the delegation how important it is to address gender equality in cases where it's necessary.

In addition to further impoverishment, violence increases, in part due to the multiplication of right-wing and masculinist groups. These groups are partly to blame for increasingly overt sexist commentary since Trump was elected president. It's as though the president's openly hostile attitude towards women opened the door to an outpouring of contemptuous and degrading comments, especially on social media.

1. The Intersyndicale des femmes is composed of the following labour organizations: APTS, CSD, CSQ, FAE, FIQ, SFPQ, SPGQ. The FIQ has been a member since 1988.



Consultation

It was in this context that the convention committee went to consult the Women's Network activists. During a brainstorming session, participants identified actions that they could take individually or collectively to become agents of change in the organization. They also looked at how a situation can be evaluated in order to identify the best strategies for action.

During the consultation, everyone was able to voice their thoughts on this important issue: *Take a stand* as a Women's Network to ensure that

it plays a key role in the Federation. Some ideas that came out of the consultation: raise awareness about feminist struggles and the changes they have brought about; offer more training sessions on feminist issues; start up local status of women committees to reach more members; establish a presence on social media; and, of course, participate more in meetings. All of these suggestions will help the Women's Network to broaden its influence and continue to advance gender equality.



At the microphone: Suzanne Morin, Centre d'accueil Marcelle-Ferron - PSSU