

International Women's Day: an invitation for societies to do better



Shirin Ebadi and Samantha Cristoforetti addressed MEPs in Strasbourg for International Women's Day © European Union 2023 - EP

In a ceremony marking International Women's Day, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi and astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti addressed MEPs in Strasbourg.

Political group speakers paid tribute to the women heroes who are an inspiration to young girls - to working mothers taking care of their families, those affected by gender-based violence, women refugees running from war, schoolgirls in danger and the women helping other women fight for their right to a safe abortion. Speaking of the case of activist Justyna Wydrzyńska, convicted to eight months of community service in Poland yesterday for helping a woman access an abortion, some MEPs called for the right to abortion to be added to the EU Charter of

Fundamental Rights. They reiterated that women outside of Europe who need our solidarity must not be forgotten.

President Metsola said International Women's Day is not only a moment to recognise the achievements of women and girls across the world. It should also be a call to action to strengthen gender equality across all spheres of our society. Seeing it as an invitation for societies to do better, President Metsola said: "The time is now for the European Union to lead by example - to set standards in criminalising violence against women, to improve access to justice, and to ratify the Istanbul Convention before the end of this term." The President's full speech is available [here](#).

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen praised all the courageous Iranian women fighting for their "freedom to show their hair or cover it, to study, work, to love without asking for anyone's permission" and for inspiring women across the world. She stressed the massive amount of work still needed to protect women and vowed to deliver on the first EU law on combatting violence against women. She thanked all the role models, who show young boys and girls they can be whatever they want to be and concluded by stating, "it is time for a world of equality and fair chances, not just for girls but for all of us".

In her address, Commander Cristoforetti stressed that space is an essential element of everyday life, used for essential services such as environmental monitoring, disaster response and financial transactions. She noted that she was the first European woman commander of the International Space Station "but certainly not the last", pointing out that last year, the European Space Agency selected a new class of career and reserve astronauts of which over half are women. The ability to send humans into space builds confidence that we can tackle difficult challenges. "If we can send humans into space, there's nothing we cannot do, right?" she said. "Let us have that ambition in Europe. I have flown to space twice - in Russian and US vehicles - I dream one day of seeing astronauts fly to space in a European one."

Dr Shirin Ebadi appealed to MEPs not to turn their back on the protests in Iran, sparked by the murder of the young Mahsa Amini, in which more than 550 people have reportedly lost their lives and more than 20 000 were arrested. Ebadi described the dire situation of imprisoned journalists, lawyers, writers, artists, foreign activists and young schoolgirls, and the absence of a functioning and independent justice system. She reiterated the protestors' demands for a regime change under the slogan "Woman, life, freedom". Calling on democracies to not remain indifferent to human rights violations in the country, she urged them to name the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](#) a terrorist group. She reassured Europeans that if democracy is established in Iran, not only will the number of refugees fleeing be reduced but Iranians will be able to rebuild their country, bringing peace and calm to the region.

Click [here](#) to watch the statements by Roberta Metsola, EP President and Ursula von der Leyen, Commission President.

To watch the political groups' reactions again, [click here](#).

The statements by Commander Samantha Cristoforetti and Dr Shirin Ebadi are available to watch again [here](#).

Background

The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Shirin Ebadi in 2003 for her work for democracy and human rights, focused especially on the rights of women and children.

Samantha Cristoforetti is a European Space Agency astronaut and the first woman Chief Commander of International Space Station Expedition 68.

Further information

[Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality](#)

[European Parliament Research Service: International Women's Day 2023: Gender equality in the shadow of successive crises](#)

[Statement of Chair of Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee Robert Biedroń for international women's day \(08.03.2023\)](#)

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