

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Batasan Hills, Quezon City

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 371

RECEIVED	
DATE:	<u>30 JUN 2016</u>
TIME:	<u>2:30 PM</u>
BY:	<u>AS</u>
REGISTRATION UNIT BILLS AND INDEX SERVICE	

Introduced by

Gabriela Women's Party Reps. ARLENE D. BROSAS and EMMI A. DE JESUS

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The International Women's Day (IWD) has gone a long way since it was first observed by militant women textile workers in New York in 1909. Spreading across the continents, especially in countries with rapidly growing women workers, it had become by the first decade of the previous century a truly international event that women observed it even during the two world wars. Through sustained observance by militant women, IWD has become emblematic of the women's role in society and their vital contributions to history and human progress as well as of their fight against violence against women and their struggles for the right to vote, equal rights and employment opportunities, and liberation from patriarchy.

In 1975, it was finally recognized by the United Nations which set March 8 of every year as the date for its worldwide observance. In countries like Great Britain, China, Australia and many countries in continental Europe, the IWD is considered to have the same significance as the Labor Day and is celebrated as a non-working holiday.

In the Philippines, the IWD was first commemorated in 1971. Its observance hereabouts had focused a shining light on the role of women in fighting the Marcos dictatorship, establishing a tradition of militant social involvement with its own long gallery of women martyrs in the fight for national freedom and democracy and dignity for Filipino women. About a half of the multitudes that made up the People's Power that ousted Marcos in 1986 were women. And they have sustained such tradition even in the post-Marcos era.


It is therefore just fitting that on March 8, 1988, President Corazon C. Aquino signed Proclamation No. 224 declaring every first week of March as 'Women's Week' and every March 8 as 'Women's Rights and International Peace Day'. She supplemented this with Proclamation No. 227, declaring March as 'Women's Role in History Month'. In 1990, she signed into law Republic Act No. 6949 that declared March 8 of every year as a special working holiday to be known as National Women's Day.

Meanwhile, decades after the IWD was first observed in the country, more and more Filipino women have entered the labor force, enlarging their contribution to the national economy as workers in agricultural plantations, factories, in the service sector, and as OFWs. Women also constitute half of the employees in the public sector, including in the government financial institutions (GFIs) and government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs).

But as the years passed, the initial euphoria of having a day dedicated to women gradually gave way to general indifference even by women. Although the Philippine Commission for Women and LGUs have made earnest efforts to hold public IWD activities, these efforts were undermined by the fact that only a few women could attend those public activities because the most numerous of them have to report to their factories, offices and workplaces. The 'obligation' to report to work undermines their participation in those public activities; it

undermines their sense of IWD as a holiday dedicated to them. Because they had to report for work, many women are not even aware that there exists a date in every year that is celebrated as IWD. Consequently, the IWD, or March 8, has not really attained the public significance it truly deserves and has not really served its purpose of raising awareness on women's role in our society. In fact, its significance pales in comparison to the foundation day of chartered cities in the country, many of which have, by law, attained non-working holiday status.

It is because of this that this bill proposes to declare March 8 of every year as a non-working holiday to allow our working women to celebrate the International Women's Day in a truly meaningful way.


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AN ACT
TO MAKE THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY A NON-WORKING HOLIDAY,
THEREBY AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 6949 OR 'AN ACT TO DECLARE MARCH EIGHT OF
EVERY YEAR AS A WORKING HOLIDAY TO BE KNOWN AS NATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY'

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. The National Women's Day, declared as March 8 of every year in the Philippines as provided under Republic Act 6949 is hereby declared a *non-working holiday* in recognition of the contribution of women in all aspects of national development and in consonance with the International Women's Day celebrated around the world.

SECTION 2. Further to the provisions of R.A. 6949, all government agencies at all levels, including attached agencies and Local Government Units, and government-owned and controlled corporations, through their GAD Focal Persons, shall prepare and implement a program in the observance of the National Women's Day on March 8 of every year, commemorating the role of women in the history of the country and promoting awareness on women's rights and participation in national development.

SECTION 3. Pursuant to the Magna Carta of Women, the Philippine Commission on Women, as the government's primary policy-making body on women and gender equality concerns, shall coordinate, monitor, and ensure the implementation of this Act.

SECTION 4. Funds for the implementation of this Act shall be taken out of the 5 % Gender and Development budget allotted to all government agencies and local government units.

SECTION 5. If, for any reason, any section or provision of this Act is held to be unconstitutional or invalid, the validity of other sections herein shall not be affected thereby.

SECTION 6. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following its publication in two national newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,