

BPW Montreal Launch

Her Excellencies, Honourable Minister, Our keynote Speaker – the Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova and Chair of the Women Heads of Mission, Ms. Ala Beleavschii; Leaders from Government and Business; BPW Montreal President Christine Poulin, Executive board of BPW Montreal; Alberta Liaison from BPW Calgary who is present here today representing the National Board, Ms. Dawn Elizabeth Nason; Our partners, supporters and of course my BPW sisters here in Montreal: Bonsoir and Good Evening to all of you!

It is my privilege as President of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women to be here in Montreal. This city holds a special place in my heart and let me share my personal connection to the French People and the City of Montreal. I immigrated to Canada almost 40 years ago from Africa just after my 10th birthday... and in Calgary my grade 5 teacher Mr. McClure was not only my French teacher but my homeroom teacher. Although I spoke English fluently, he noticed I also spoke another language (kacchi which is an East Indian dialect as my ancestors originally came from India 4 generations ago). Mr. McClure & I shared something in common: we both spoke 2 languages. What was interesting is that he would ask so what is red in kacchi? I'd say "rato" and he'd say "In French that would be rouge". I realized that red, rato and rouge all started with the letter "r" and that there was much we had in common. Mr. McClure had a huge impact on me as I adjusted to a new life in Canada. He was my homeroom and French teacher for only 3 months before we broke out for the summer. For the rest of my schooling until I finished High School, I always took French as an elective (and was totally fluent after 7 years when I graduated from Grade 12). Of course I need to brush up on my French again!! Because much happened after high school... philosophy, law, marriage, practicing Immigration, and having my children who are now 20 and 17.

I was in Montreal for the very first time ten years ago in 2007 and spent the summer here at McGill University. I was enrolled in the Summer Programme on Islam. It was offered through the Institute of Ismaili Studies in partnership with McGill. That summer, my husband and children were here with me and after my classes, we'd be exploring Montreal, Old Montreal, the majestic Lawrence River and so on. Since then we come every year or so.... I've spent Christmas here with my family and visited the Notre Dame Basilica (which by the way reminds me of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome... and our very memorable trip to Vatican City.... being in the presence of the Pope at his Summer Residence, what an experience). Yes, we have much in common in spite of our differences because certain values – of peace, of compassion, of justice and of equality are truly universal values.

And so as the First Muslim President of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women, I often speak of bringing diversity into our organization and I am not only speaking of diversity in terms of religion or race, or of origin and ethnicity, but also diversity in age (our young BPWs are under 35 and a handful of our mentors are in their 70's and 80s); diversity in thought – BPW is unique in that it comprises of women from a broad range of industries and professions. We are in over 100 countries and are 35,000 members strong globally. The International Federation of Business and Professional Women holds Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council. In Canada we are almost 500 members and our mandate is to improve conditions for all women, socially, economically and politically. We have been around since 1930 and are over 87 years old! We take great pride in this strong history and legacy.

Right here in Montreal, just to give you a more local perspective... you will be pleased to learn that our very first national president of BPW Canada was from Montreal. In fact the local club here in Montreal was formed in 1926, 4 years before the national federation was established. And since then we have had 4 presidents from Montreal act as national presidents at BPW Canada.

BPW Montreal has demonstrated great leadership nationally over the decades and I am very excited to see where we will be heading with this formal launch which is to reinstate BPW Montreal to renew its energy and reinforce its commitment to improve conditions for all women across the City of Montreal and the Province of Quebec, as well as nationally and internationally.

Earlier this evening we conducted an intimate Charter Ceremony to formally install the new officers into their respective offices. I'd like to request that the executive board of BPW Montreal to rise and be recognized. Let us applaud the dedication of these women leaders from BPW Montreal.

Lastly, before I end, I would like to acknowledge this very special moment in history for the City of Montreal and also in our country. Not only is this year Canada's 150th Anniversary of Confederation but it is Montreal's 375th Birthday. This is a very significant occasion for all of us as we rekindle BPW Montreal. On my flight here I read about your Subway or Electric Train which is marking its 50 years of service and I noticed that as you introduced the new sleek cars, you also kept some traditional ones. It tells me that Montreal thinks about the future as it continues to reflect on its own past. You can also walk through these new modern cars so you can go from one car to another without having to get off. This, to me, represents the willingness to be more accessible, more open, and that means we, as people, can have greater and more inclusive dialogue.

And I'd like to encourage BPW Montreal to do the same. Let us take pride in BPW's strong history and legacy while revitalizing our chapter in Montreal to address the needs of today's modern business and professional women. Let us improve conditions for all women so that they are truly able to reach their full potential. Let us make a difference... because when women succeed so do their families, their communities and their societies.

Thank You very much.... Merci beaucoup.