

Multicultural women's day: Speech

H.M. The Queen's speech at IMDi's multicultural 8 March celebrations in Folketeateret, Oslo, 8 March 2013.

Dear women,
Dear everyone,
Happy anniversary!

For more than 100 years a beautiful statue of Camilla Collett has graced the palace grounds. The author and women's rights activist was born exactly 200 years ago. She stands there in bronze – and appears to shiver in her shawls. Every 8 March a wreath is laid at her feet – as a token of respect from Norwegian women.

160 years ago Camilla Collett wrote about women who in various ways struggled to find their place in society in the novel “The District Governor's daughters.” She describes women who had to struggle for acceptance and to be heard. The women in “The District Governor's Daughters” left their homes, where they had their roots, and went to new places where they were strangers.

I believe that many of us here today can relate to this directly...

I would like to draw a more personal line back to more recent history, 1975 to be exact. It was the UN International Women's Year, and I was a young crown princess of 38. I had already lived for many years in very male-dominated environment, and had had to fight my battles on several stages. It perhaps therefore felt both natural and important to me to actively participate in the celebrations of the United Nation's International Women's Year. I knew a thing or two about living surrounded by men who ran the show. I had come to learn that I had to use my voice if I was to be heard. But I had also experienced that I *had* a voice – after struggling with myself.

I will never forget that in the International Women's Year I went to open a travelling exhibition in Halden. It was called “9 women.” Imagine – I arrived in Halden by train, and on the platform I was greeted by – three men. Typical!

Later on the same year I had the pleasure of heading the work on selecting paintings for the “Woman and Art” exhibition at Kunstnernes Hus, and I was extremely proud when I had the opportunity to present the committee – which consisted of as many women as men.

Since then, in many ways Norwegian society has undergone an amazing transformation – in this area as well.

One development I particularly appreciate, is the one that Norwegian women of today have backgrounds from all over the world. This enriches our society through a diverse culture that is constantly changing. Roots give us security. But roots also need to be liberated and given nourishment in order to create life and a foundation.

No matter where I arrive – whether I visit a suburb in Oslo or a village in North Norway – it strikes me that women from all over the world are active in their local communities; women

who have become role models and everyday heroines in their communities. It is women who make the world go round. More and more also hold important positions in society – such as our own Minister of Culture.

At the same time, there is a lot of ground to cover in some areas, especially in the big cities. We need stronger social participation from, of and by *all* women of *all* ages – both socially, in working life and where decisions are made.

There are many ways to use one's voice: By speaking out at a parents meeting, by being brave enough to state an unpopular view, by defending someone in a vulnerable position – and by casting your vote in elections. Something *happens* to us when we use our voices:

It makes us stand a little taller.

It gives us greater confidence and belief in ourselves.

It reconfirms our sense of dignity. Sometimes we have to push ourselves to dare to use our voices. But each time we do, we become a bit more complete as a person.

When I return to the Palace later on, I will send an thankful nod in the direction of the statue of Camilla Collett – because she contributed to ease the path of the women who came after her. Poet Åse-Marie Nesse has written a beautiful poem about this trailblazing woman. I would like to conclude with a few lines from it:

“You shiver in your shawls, Camilla Collett
You – sister of the constitution – saw it:

Freedom was only for fathers and sons and brothers
and you cried to the daughters of the future
of the right to choose their path,
the right to learn to fly...”

Happy anniversary!