

Plenty of gains for women, but global events show us

International Women's Day usually starts me thinking about how we will work to achieve further progress on gender equity.

But, alarmingly, this year I'm also looking at the rise of polarising populist politics, both internationally and here in Australia and wondering whether we will need to mobilise to defend the progress made and rights we thought we'd secured.

This year is the 114th International Women's Day since its inaugural celebration on March 8, 1911, and the

Polarising political trends are making life harder not just for women, but for human rights at large, writes **Meg Webb**

30th anniversary of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for equal rights for all women and girls. You would think the end should be in sight when it comes to delivering equality, safety or guaranteed rights for women and girls. However, even after a century of activism and a declaration endorsed

by 189 governments laying out a comprehensive plan on 12 "critical areas of concern" spanning the economy, employment and political participation, peace, environmental justice, ending violence against women and more, we are still left far short of realising a gender equal society.

In fact, our journey towards full and genuine gender equality stubbornly refuses to take a straightforward linear route.

The ongoing social and economic fault lines exacerbated by Covid-19 pandemic pressures, the current cost-of-living crisis, critical shortages in safe and affordable housing, and the climate emergency, all risk being exploited by populist politics to undermine gender equality.

But turning a blind eye to any human rights abuse undermines social cohesion in our society, let

alone the systemic ongoing human rights abuses based on gender. It is timely for another rallying cry for genuine gender equity for all women, girls and the gender diverse.

So how should Tasmania heed the rallying call of this year's IWD themes of "Accelerate Action" and "March Forward"?

We need to make gender equality part of the practical architecture of our decision-making. To do this, I have long argued for the systematic, mandated application of a gender lens in government decision making.

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this is no time to take our foot off the progress pedal

And, yes, some action has occurred.

Following the Legislative Council voting in support of my motion to introduce annual gender budget impact statements, we saw the first attempt delivered with the 2022-23 state budget.

While subsequent gender impact statements have improved incrementally, they are yet to adequately recognise the barriers experienced by the gender diverse and women of colour, different religions, ages, or those living with a disability, for example.

This recognition that one size does not fit all, would accelerate the delivery of targeted and effective reforms.

Another essential is the elimination of gender-based violence, which persists at alarmingly high levels in our community. Far too many Tasmanian women's lives are being ruined and lost to men's violence.

The normalisation of human rights violations, such as gender-based violence, impacts Tasmanians' opportunities for education, for work, as well as presenting avoidable health

and other economic costs. Continued focus is needed on the gender pay gap, which persists as a clear indicator of ongoing discrimination and continues to undermine the economic security of many Tasmanians.

While Tasmania recorded the lowest gender pay gap, we could accelerate its closure by including measures such as government grants requiring a gender and pay parity policy assessment of corporate recipients' workforce.

Gender equality needs to be at the

forefront of policy development. All significant policy proposals and draft legislation put forward in cabinet are usually accompanied by a formal checklist that identifies a range of considerations including any potential budgetary implications.

I have long called for that formal checklist to include a standard report on gender equality implications. To do so also strengthens transparency and good governance in our public policy decision-making, which has the added bonus of benefiting everyone.

For some, IWD is a time to celebrate achievements and who we are. For others it is dedicated to reflection and evaluation of what must still be done.

Our rallying calls this year seeks to do both. Yes, gains have been achieved over the years, but we cannot risk stalling, or worse, going backwards. To ensure our community benefits from real active gender equality, we must accelerate action and move forward with determination. **Meg Webb is the independent member for Nelson**