

# PROXY OBSERVER

INFORMAMOS A LA COMUNIDAD INTERNACIONAL

## Spot Report: International Women's Day in Madrid

Prepared for:

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Reference: [#DiaDeLaMujer](#) (5/March/2015)

### INTRODUCTION:

The objective of this spot report is to provide the OSCE / ODIHR with a brief description and background information, on an event celebrated in Madrid on *International Women's Day*.

The report contains details of the route taken, the total number of participants, as well as some of the more positive aspects of the event. An event which was not only fun but served to highlight some of the more pressing issues affecting the feminist movement in Spain.

### LOCATION & DATE OF PROTEST

The Women's Day event, which took place simultaneously in Madrid, Seville and Valencia, formed part of international celebrations across Europe and the rest of the world. This report concentrates only on the event in Madrid for March 8, a day the *United Nations* designated *International Women's Day*.

### BACKGROUND TO THE PROTEST:

The event in Madrid had as its central aim the recognition of women's right in the context of social equality. It was in affect, a day for women as individual people and not merely as extensions of men.

Spain's feminist movement has been slowly growing in influence since the 1960's, working closely with other collectives to improve working conditions for women. Improvements in basic salaries and the right to vote in elections, have also formed part of the struggle for social equality.

It was in 1911 that social changes and improvements in working conditions for women took a giant leap. This sudden change came after a tragedy in a **factory** in New York, where 100 women workers died in a devastating fire, the causes of which are still not fully known.

The tragic fire revealed the appalling working conditions suffered by mostly immigrant women who died from smoke inhalation and even suicide, when they were unable to escape the flames due to locked doors at the factory.

*International Women's Day* is celebrated in many western countries. China and Russia also hold popular celebrations. In Spain the first ever Women's Day was celebrated in 1936 during the second Republic; the same year as the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

### **EVENT ORGANISERS:**

The *Coordinadora Feminista Madrid @aportodasmadrid* was the collective behind all the hard work that went into making this event the huge success that it was. Everything from the choice of music to loudspeakers and security cordon, had to be organised to ensure the event went without hitches.

### **THE PRESS:**

Not surprisingly for such a huge media event, almost all of Spain's TV channels and press were present at this event, including: *Europa Press*, EFE, TVE, *La Sexta*, COPE, SER and the notoriously right-wing *TeleMadrid*. They competed for that perfect shot, and conducted interviews along the route.

Our observation was that some of the controlled press, were very grumpy, especially when people stood in the way of their shots. In fact, these people were the main reason why these photographers were there in the first place, and made the most interesting subjects.

### **THE EVENT:**

The route for the Madrid event was from a roundabout known as *Cibeles*, to the central plaza of *Puerta del Sol*. At the agreed time, 12pm, small groups of people began to gather with their musical instruments, mostly drums.

Security was noticeably higher in the area around *Cibeles* with at least three police vans positioned outside Spain's central bank, the *Banco de España*. Additional UIP police vans were present in the area near the official Town Hall building over-looking *Cibeles*.

The predominant colour of the day as worn by participants was violet, a colour associated with the **feminist movement**. The turnout was high, approximately 5,000 with a diverse mix of children, adults and all the races imaginable. Some Muslim women were also visible in their traditional headscarfs.

Many organisations and collectives were represented at this event, including several unions: CGT and UGT, political parties: *Podemos*, *Izquierda Unida*, PCE and a republican group. A gay collective known as COGAN, *Coca Cola en Lucha* from a closed factory in Fuenlabrada and a group of hepatitis C patients campaigning to get treatment. The activist chorus group, *Solfónica*, was also there to perform their stirring song.

The event organisers had previously informed the authorities of the Mar 8 event. A large but reasonably discrete police presence was deployed. Two ambulances and at least two small lorries with loudspeakers also accompanied marches on their way to *Puerta del Sol*.

The *Coordinadora Feminista Madrid* had organised a very impressive security cordon, which did an excellent job in informing people. After a quick song from *Solfónica*, we were off, waving a multitude of coloured flags and chanting along the way to the beat of the **drums**.

The short route from *Cibeles* to *Puerta del Sol* took a surprisingly long time, as we stopped and then started again as instructed to do by the security cordon with their whistles. The mood of the grumpy press suddenly changed, when a feminist activist defiantly ripped off her bra to the sound of a thousand camera clicks. The press finally had their **shot**.

### **THE MANIFESTO:**

At 2pm, the hottest part of the day, we finally arrived in *Puerta del Sol*, where a large crowd of people eagerly waited for us to arrive. A human circle was formed and **violet ribbons** were extended in an inspired crisscross pattern, both as decoration and to keep participants at a certain distance from those reading the manifesto.

The political content of the manifesto was one of the most socially relevant we have heard at any event. Unfortunately, the hand-held megaphone used was simply not powerful enough to be heard at such a distance, so the **speakers** were at times barely audible with all the background noise.

However, despite some initial sound problems, the organisers were able to get their main message across, including the need to tackle the growing problem of gender violence. Social cuts to public services, and the negative effects these have had on working women, was also mentioned.

Abortion is a contentious issue in Spain, and the organisers expressed their total rejection of the inclusion of this social aspect in the criminal code. Safe, state funded abortions for all women regardless of income, was called for.

Equality of salary for female workers, an end to gender violence and the issue of shared custody, were also topics at this event, along with the rights of immigrant women who are seen as the most socially disadvantaged of all women.

## **POLICE ID CHECKS:**

Our information is that no ID checks were carried out by police on those present at this event. There were no reports in either the mainstream press or on social media of any unwarranted identification checks.

## **SECRET POLICE & INFILTRATORS:**

There are no reports to confirm the presence of secret police or infiltrators at this event, though it is likely that undercover police officers were present at this event as a matter of routine.

## **POLICE PRESENCE:**

Police numbers at this event were still unnecessarily high, although this may be explained in part by the presence of so-called high-ranking political figures at the event. Some, it seems, are keen to be photographed in an election year.

At one point near the start of the march, Spanish police asked people to step off the grass verge which runs along the centre of the road separating the two main carriages. This, the police did, while standing on the grass verge themselves with their standard issue heavy police boots. A case of *"do as I say, not as I do"*.

While most UIP officers at this event were correctly uniformed with ID numbers clearly visible, some continue to "forget" their ID numbers at home, or cover them with additional safety clothing. Likewise, despite the heat of the day, a small percentage of policemen had their faces covered while on duty.

## **ARRESTS & INJURIES:**

No arrests or injuries were reported on the day. The event was well organised and security levels were adequate. The organisers should be congratulated for their hard work and excellent planning. A complete success from start to finish.

## **THE AUTHORITIES:**

Spanish authorities fail to take the issue of violence against women seriously enough. It would be interesting to see the reaction of the *Interior Ministry* if the victims of violence were policemen and not women. We can be pretty sure that in such a scenario, the Spanish government would propose elevating crimes of gender violence to the level of acts of terrorism.

The opposition in Spain is just as out of touch. They recently proposed giving women who were killed by their violent partners a **"state funeral"**, to which feminist groups responded that they would prefer not to be killed. The fact is, that Spain still has a lot of catching up to do when it comes to the issue of equality and women's rights.

Women occupy only **5%** of executive posts. Their salaries are in most sectors **25%** inferior to those of their male counterparts. The *United Nations* confirmed in a recent **report** that social equality among men and women in Spain, is as far as ever. That difference is all the greater in the case of immigrant or low-income women.

### **REPORT CONCLUSIONS:**

In this, an election year, Spanish politicians want to be seen supporting the issue of social equality and women's rights, but not too much. It's interesting that at this event all those who turned up for a photo opportunity stood right at the back of the march, some surrounded by up to 25 bodyguards.

Likewise, none of the political personalities present at this event took part in the reading of the manifesto. Afraid, perhaps, of being booed by the crowd. The fact is, that hardly a week goes by without another headline about a woman being fired from her job for being pregnant.

That's what this *Women's Day* event was all about: equal treatment, pay and conditions for all workers regardless of their gender. It was about real social issues affecting real women, like safe abortion and gender violence. Unfortunately, some of those present, saw the event as yet another photo opportunity to grab the headlines for themselves.

### **REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to confirm with the government in Madrid whether the unusually large number of police officers at this event, were there to protect those who turned up for a photo opportunity.

We suggest the OSCE / ODIHR ask the government in Madrid to outline their proposals to guarantee the rights of immigrant women workers.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR invite the delegation in Madrid to publicly congratulate feminist organisations for the *Women's Day* event, and their excellent work and hard efforts.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to confirm with Madrid whether they intend to remove the clauses pertaining to abortion from the criminal code.

We suggest the OSCE / ODIHR raise the issue of equal pay for equal work with Spanish authorities.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to clarify with Madrid, how it plans to deal with the issue of gender violence in Spanish society.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR raise the issue of salary differences between men and women in Spain with the Spanish government.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to encourage Madrid to ensure employers comply with the law with regard to women's rights and maternity leave.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to invite Spanish authorities to comment on the recent UN report on equal right in Spain.

Finally, we suggest the OSCE / ODIHR confirm with Madrid whether the Spanish government is committed to social justice and equality for all citizens.

**Report date: 24/March/2015**

### **RELEVANT VIDEOS & PHOTOGRAPHS:**

VIDEO summary of Women's Day event  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nv5EwaDGzSc>

VIDEO of EFE TV report  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD6dU9z-\\_78](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD6dU9z-_78)

Official poster of Mar 8 event  
<http://goo.gl/4Qkqop>

Photographs and background information on this event  
<http://proxyobserver.weebly.com/diamujer.html>

**For more reports on past and future protests**  
<http://proxyobserver.weebly.com/informes.html>