

Gina Navarrete

My name is Gina Navarrete and I am so proud to address you today as the Co-President of the Charlotte Women's March. We thank you for showing your support on this chilly day. You inspire and motivate us to continue to do the work we are doing.

Like many of you here, I wasn't really involved in politics or activism before the 2016 election. But in January 2017, like many here, I WOKE! and began to volunteer. The million-dollar question is what to do with this newly found insight. Will we come out better for it?

The answer to that question is in all the women-led movements. Women feel empowered and this continues to spread like wildfire. In India, 5 million Women stood next to each other to create the largest human chain in history, to protest sexual abuse and violence. Those women, like all of you, learned that we are powerful, relentless, and that we don't need to be invited to the table to TAKE A SEAT at the table.

And if you doubt yourself and ask, what can I do? Am I not just one WOMAN?

Remember that . . .

It was a WOMAN that initiated the American Equal Rights Association
It was a WOMAN who helped many find freedom through the underground railroad
It was a frail looking, humble WOMAN who went among the untouchables in the streets of India to treat those with leprosy.

AND...

Who do you think refused to give up her seat on a bus in Alabama?
[say it with me] A WOMAN!

Increasing women in government by 5% has shown that countries become 5 TIMES LESS LIKELY to use violence in a crisis. Just 5%!!! States and countries are also more likely to achieve lasting peace after a conflict when women are part of the negotiations. Throughout history, women have earned a reputation as peacemakers!

So let's not forget . . .

It was 20,000 WOMEN who marched in South Africa to protest the first Apartheid Laws

It was Muslim and Christian WOMEN who together crossed the "red zone" in Africa and got armed militias to put down their weapons and end rival wars
It was WOMEN that stopped the genocide in the Congo

And

It was the peaceful protests of thousands of Muslim and Christian Women that led to the end of the 14year war in Liberia

Around the World 1 in 3 WOMEN will experience violence at some time in their lives, and many of these acts of violence will not be prosecuted. Who do you think fought back and pushed for international criminal courts to recognize rape and sexual violence as crimes against humanity and to hold the perpetrators accountable?

That is right, it was a WOMAN!!

And More recently . . . It's been WOMEN of the #METOO movement who have taken down politicians, business leaders and Hollywood moguls by coming forward and bravely speaking out against sexual harassment and assault.

Now . . . Our marches have not been embraced by everyone. Many have tried to divide us; some have compared our peaceful marches to angry mobs. So, when politicians ask; Why are these women still marching? We must answer that now, as always, we are marching to bring transformative change into our communities. And when politicians refer to us as "a bunch of silly girls", you remind them that women have always been the source of change.

But..., how long are we going to allow healthcare disparities, wage gaps and other gender inequalities?

How long are we going to let politicians try to dictate what we can and cannot do with our bodies?

How long are we going to allow the rights of immigrants and the LGBTQ community to be marginalized?

How long are we going to let corporations and special interest groups gamble with our environment; our children's futures due to greed, & . . .

How long are we going to watch our brown and black children be harassed – and even killed – for merely walking down the street?

We are tired of being marginalized, patronized and just plain ignored. They may not have invited us to the table, but we are taking our rightful place and sitting down. We are here, we are powerful, and we are OVER 50% of the population!

So... it is about damn time that we have equal representation in government, in corporations, and in all leadership positions. As Justice Ginsburg said; Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. And I don't know about you, but I think it is about time that a WOMAN also took her rightful place in the White House.

In closing, let me just remind you that no amount of Marches will mean anything if we don't do the work and VOTE. So, don't just complain... Girl-up and do something about it!!!!

In the words of Susan B. Anthony; Organize, Agitate and Educate. And I will add my favorite four-letter word, VOTE.