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Women in Chicago have special cause for celebration on March 8

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by Jing Zhao Cesarone

CHICAGO, March 8 (Xinhua) -- Women in Chicago have a special reason to celebrate: It was here that their predecessors created a tradition that has now been observed for a hundred years around the world.

On Monday, hundreds of women from various walks of life gathered in downtown Chicago to mark the 100th International Women's Day. They gathered to commemorate their century-old struggle to promote gender equality.

"We just want a day when Chicago can celebrate women around the world, because women work so well together, and they bring people together," Peggy Parfenoff, executive director of the International Visitors Center of Chicago and joint host of Monday's celebration, said.

It was in Chicago where on March 8, 1909, various women's societies held a joint demonstration to demand equal treatment. A year later, a resolution was passed in the Danish capital Copenhagen to designate the day as "International Women's Day" in memory of the Chicago demonstration.

"We want to reach out and celebrate International Women's Day in our town, Chicago," added Parfenoff.

A special fair was held in Chicago to mark the centenary of the special occasion.

The fair was sponsored and joined by members of the International Trade Club of Chicago, the International Visitors Center of Chicago, the Union League Club, Today's Global Women, Inc., Women in Management Inc., Professional Women's Club in Chicago, Women's Equal Rights Amendment, and the American Association of University Women-Illinois.

"The Equal Rights Amendment, first proposed in 1923 to affirm that women and men have equal rights under law, is still not part of the U.S. Constitution. There is no constitutional protection for women except for the right to vote, and many women here are unaware of that," said Karen Boehning from the Women's Equal Rights Amendment.

"There is a lot of work left to do. The U.S. is still lagging far behind other countries who have given full rights to women," the activist added.

Katrina Laffin, national chairperson of the Women in Management, Inc., said: "Recognizing women on an international scale is really significant, especially when you consider that for 100 years, this day has been set aside just for women.

"It is wonderful to see so many people turn out to support women in various roles," Laffin commented on the unusual turnout at the fair, which offered information and an exhibition about women's activities ranging from health care to education, from clothing to charity.

Maryn McKenna, an independent journalist and author who specializes in public health, was the key speaker at this year's fair, with a presentation on women's key role in epidemic prevention and protection.

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Some men also turned out to join the women at the fair, the ninth version since it was formalized into an annual event in 2002.

Apart from the exhibits on display, some women's societies have launched special websites to offer online services.

Sheila Harris, president and CEO of the Today's Global Women, Inc., told visitors that her online magazine is geared "towards all women, regardless where you are from, your color, or your culture."

Her vice president, Palistean Nash, added: "We actually publish encouraging, inspirational poems on our website. The Cultural Spot section shares cultures of women from different countries so that we can have a better understanding of each other and better connect with women from around the world."

Editor: Zhang Xiang

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