This year, International Woman’s Day is even more moving for me, because I am by your side, sisters of Haiti, as you strive to recover from disaster and rebuild.

First of all, I want to join with everyone mourning the disappearance in the earthquake on January 12 of so many Haitian women committed to defending women’s rights, some of whom had very close ties with Canada.

Some were my friends, women I admired very much.

On the road of equality, which is fraught with so many pitfalls, those activists blazed a trail for women and girls here and around the world. We are forever indebted to them, and the least we can do is continue their immense work. For them. And for all those women who remain, fight, and hope.

We know that Haiti is experiencing terrible suffering because of the earthquake and of poverty, which was already endemic before the disaster, and that it is the most vulnerable, namely women and children, who are paying the highest price.

In these situations of crisis and destabilization, it is women who continue to look after all needs.

Women of Haiti, the entire world knows that you are the pillars of your society.

It is women who have to find food and water, while caring for the children and the survivors.

Women of Haiti, the entire world is aware of the efforts you make on a daily basis.

And it is women who are the most subject to violence, including sexual violence.

We must demand that women’s dignity be respected.

It is also women who mobilize the forces of the community and take charge of the available resources, as they know how to do so well.

Moreover, was it not to you, the women, that the World Food Programme entrusted humanitarian aid, knowing that the supplies would be better distributed?

The women of Haiti bear the country on their heads, and its future in their bellies.
We are convinced that no reconstruction is possible without the participation of women.

If no women are involved, it will surely fail.

I am proud to be a descendant of those courageous, stubborn women of Haiti.

Those women, like my mother and grandmother, who always had the strength to confront fate.

Those women who made every sacrifice so that their children could have better living conditions than they ever did themselves.

What did I learn from them? I learned that every trial is an opportunity to find inner strength and learn from our experiences so that we can overcome and carry on.

Haiti, women of Haiti, girls and boys of Haiti, know that you are not alone.

Together, we have mourned the dead.

Together, we are trying to comfort the living.

Together, we shall rebuild.

Life must triumph in Haiti.

And it is up to the entire Haitian people to shape the country’s future.

It is up to you, the women, to be the pillars on which to rebuild, as you always have been, through your endurance, through the strength of your convictions, and through your unwavering hope in the face of all adversity.

All my faith rests in you.

I cannot tell you how moved I am to be here with you.