

## Raising Our Voices: Celebrating International Women's Day 2015

What an amazing event! On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Winnipeg celebrated International Women's Day in a very special way. Organized by the Institute for International Women's Rights – Manitoba, with support from Westminster Church; the Womyn's Centre, University of Winnipeg, and the Institute for International Women's Rights Global College, Raising Our Voices celebrated the strength and voices of women, locally and globally.

There were over 320 women and men and children in the audience that evening, all coming to experience what turned out to be a very moving evening. No tickets were sold. There was a special appeal to support the Panzi Hospital in the Congo and the work of Dr. Mukwege. For more than two decades, the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has suffered conflict, with soldiers and armed rebels both using rape as a weapon, though recent studies also find an increase in rapes by civilians. A 2011 study published in The American Journal of Public Health for example reported 1,100 rapes daily. **We "passed the hat" and raised over \$2,215 to send to Dr. Mukwege!**



The evening began with an introduction by the two youthful emcees, Angeline Rivard, and Sylvia Bahati.

The opening songs by Keewatin Otchitchak (Northern Crane) Traditional Women Singers, were incredibly strong and moving and the beat of the drum kept us going all evening.



The poem "River", written and spoken by author Katherena Vermette was a tribute to the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Raine Hamilton, accompanied by cellist Natanielle, gave the audience more inspirational music about the beauty and strength of women.



The Women of Note Chamber Choir sang two beautiful and powerful songs: Koowu by Maryam Khoury and Still I Rise by Rosephanye Powell.

With an introduction and closing by the Bahati Sisters, we were treated to a special skit "Voices of Women from Africa". Gertrude Hambera, Roxana Obasi, Florence Okwudili, and Teclar Gudu spoke of the challenges and the realities of women's lives in Africa today, but ended with words of Hope. They are indeed "Freedom Fighters".



Ending with the rousing and energetic singing of the Bahati Sisters, we were invited to come to the adjoining Lecture Hall where there were twenty displays by local organizations supporting gender equality and women's empowerment. There was great food and refreshments for all, including wonderful bannock with home made jam!

**Thanks to all who came out and supported Raising Our Voices!**

*Thanks to Hillarie Tasche for the photos!*