In 1913 African women formed a Women's League to oppose attempts by municipalities that required women to buy passes/permits each month. They played a leading role in the resistance to pass legislation because of the particular way in which influx control measures, implemented through the pass system, affected their position in society as well as family life. Petitions and demonstrations followed and ultimately the permit requirement was withdrawn.

No further attempts were made to require permits or passes until the 1950's. Women became involved in a number of campaigns focusing on issues that affected their ability to care for their children and to keep their family unit together. They protested the pass laws, education laws, rent hikes, bus fare increases, forced removals of communities and laws that prevented them from selling home brew which was an important source of income for many women.

Government shelved the idea of passes for women again and it resurfaced and was enacted in 1952. These permits or passes were not similar to a passport or an identity document as we are familiar with today. It was a document that certain people were forced by the government to carry with them at all times. With a pass they could live in urban areas and move around and look for industrial or domestic jobs for a defined period. A person without a pass was by law unemployable. People moving around without passes could be arrested on the spot.

Dora Tamana and Annie Silinga were key people at a defiance campaign in Cape Town in protests against passes that took place in Langa, Elsies River and Kensington. In 1953 Dora declared that passes made the road even narrower for them; they have seen unemployment, lack of accommodation and families broken because of passes.

The anti-pass campaign had started officially when 146 female delegates (representing 230 000 women from all parts of South Africa) attended a gathering in 1955 with the following objective: To bring women of South Africa together to secure full equality of opportunity for all women, regardless of race, colour or creed; to remove social and legal and economic disabilities; to work for the protection of the women and children of our land.

During 1955 the Women's Charter was written and were ultimately incorporated into the Freedom Charter. It called for the enfranchisement of men and women of all races, equality of opportunity in employment, equal pay for equal work; equal rights in relation to property, marriage and children; and the removal of all laws and customs that denied women such equality.

The first national protest took place on 27 October 1955 when 2 000 women of all races marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria planning to meet with certain Cabinet ministers but the ministers pointedly refused to receive the delegation.

Less than a year later a second major demonstration was organised exclusively on the pass laws. 20 000 women from all corners of South Africa and from as many different organizations as possible staged a second march on the Union Buildings to protest against the proposed amendments to the Urban Areas Act of 1950. They did what they believed was right. The Women of South Africa had sent a public message that they would not be intimidated and silenced by unjust laws.

Magdalene Matshadi Tsoane and Rahaba Mahlakedi Moeketsi mentioned that they had their children on their backs during the March. Even those who were working for white people were carrying white children with them.

Dorothy Masenya said nobody was arrested on that day because if one would have been arrested the whole force of 20 000 would have to be arrested.

After masses of individually signed protests and petitions were handed over to the Secretary of Prime Minister JG Strijdom the women sang a protest song that was composed in honour of the occasion: Wathint' imbokodo uzo kufa! You have touched the women, you have struck a rock. Since then this phrase has come to represent...
women's courage and strength. As a group that had been marginalized they rose to question the barrier and fought for their emancipation and their families within the social and political fields. As an acknowledgement of the successful demonstration, it was decided that 9 August would be commemorated annually and will be known as the Women's Day.

- Women of South Africa across all spheres of live have contributed in the making of South Africa. Organisations such as the Black Sash also mobilised women structures. Although this was a challenge because of cultural barriers that bound most women, there were some who rose above those restrictions and fought for the emancipation of South African people across racial lines.
- In 1958 many employers began to make the possession of reference books a condition of employment, even though there was no law requiring African women to register their service contracts or to carry reference books.
- The last anti-pass demonstrations took place in March 1960 before the banning of various political parties under the terms of the newly-passed Organisations Act.
- In 1960 an estimated 3,020,281 African women, approximately 75% of the adult female population of that period had accepted passes.
- During 1962 the government announced that all African women aged 16 and over would be required to carry reference books.
- The women's anti-pass campaign had lasted for more than a decade. They had resisted the implementation of laws that threatened the very core of their existence - their position in society, their ability to provide for their children, and their capacity to create for their husbands and children a stable and secure family life. The women clung to their last remaining freedom - the freedom of movement - with tenacity unparalleled in other struggles. Although they were defeated in their immediate objectives, they had gained their rightful place in the struggle for liberation.
- When former President Nelson Mandela delivered his first State of the Nation Address on 24 May 1994 he evoked the memory of Ingrid Jonker and said that in the midst of despair, she celebrated hope. "Confronted with death, she asserted the beauty of life. In the dark days when all seemed hopeless in our country, when many refused to hear her resonant voice, she took her own life. To her and others like her, we owe a commitment to the poor, the oppressed, the wretched and the despised."
- During 2004 in appointing women into the South African government President Thabo Mbeki stated "no government in SA could ever claim to represent the will of the people if it failed to address the central task of emancipation of women in all its elements, and that includes the government we are privileged to lead."
- In the State of the Nation Address in 2006 President Thabo Mbeki welcomed and honoured the presence of Sophie de Bruyn and S Williams in the house and also acknowledge Albertina Sisulu and Amina Cachalia and all the others that were part of the heroic women who marched 50 years ago thus placing the women of our country in the frontline of the struggle for national liberation.
- Currently women in the South African Joint Sitting of the National Assembly and National Council of Provinces and in the Western Cape Provincial Parliament make up much more of positions - a far cry from when Helen Suzman stood alone long ago as a woman Member of Parliament desperately urging the government to open discussion with liberation movements.
- Women are now reaping the benefits of their selfless struggle and stand tall as equal partners to their other counterparts in a democracy that has entrenched their status. Tributes to be paid to mothers, wives, daughters for their selflessness, creativity, love and commitment to their country through their words and deeds in their daily lives.
- Today women are still faced with major challenges against unemployment, poverty, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and child abuse, but it is positive and empowering
when women illustrate that they can aspire to the diversity of the roles available to them.