

# The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women - CEDAW

...because Women's Rights are Human Rights

## What is CEDAW?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is a landmark international agreement that affirms principles of fundamental human rights and equality for women around the world.

CEDAW strengthens the United States as a global leader in standing up for women and girls. Ratification would continue America's proud bipartisan tradition of promoting and protecting human rights.

CEDAW offers countries a practical blueprint to achieve progress for women and girls by calling on each ratifying country to overcome barriers to discrimination. Around the world, CEDAW has been used to reduce sex trafficking and domestic abuse; provide access to education and vocational training; ensure the right to vote; improve maternal health care; ensure the ability to work and own a business without discrimination; end forced marriage and child marriage; and ensure inheritance rights.

To date, 186 out of 193 countries have ratified CEDAW. The U.S.A. is one of only seven countries—including Iran, Sudan, Somalia, and three small Pacific Island nations (Nauru, Palau and Tonga)—that have not ratified CEDAW.

## Support CEDAW for Women and Girls

Advancing women's human rights is fundamental to America's national security interests and a cornerstone of our foreign policy. Countries are more peaceful and prosperous when women have full and equal rights and opportunity. Ratifying CEDAW would give America greater clout to help women worldwide win basic rights—to go to school, to own and inherit property, to take part in public life and to stop domestic violence and trafficking.

The CEDAW principles are important goals. Women of the world are calling for U.S. ratification as a strong signal that promoting women's rights as human rights is a priority.

American women enjoy opportunities and status not available to most of the world's women, but few would dispute that more progress is needed particularly to close the pay gap, reduce domestic violence and stop trafficking.

Ratifying CEDAW does not automatically result in changes to U.S. law. It is up to each country to determine how best to bring its policies in line with ending discrimination against women and girls. CEDAW would provide an opportunity for national dialogue on how to address persistent gaps in women's full equality. It would be a catalyst for the United States to engage in a systematic analysis of discrimination against women and develop strategies for solutions.

**CEDAW strengthens the United States as a global leader in standing up for women and girls around the world. Under the leadership of Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton, the U.S. ratified similar treaties on genocide, torture, and race.**

**Ratifying the CEDAW treaty would continue America's proud bipartisan tradition of promoting and protecting human rights. Ratification requires 67 Senators to stand together for women and has no additional financial cost.**

## CEDAW Works: Invest in Women, It Pays

Ratifying the CEDAW treaty is fundamental to America's national security and economic interests around the world. Studies by the World Bank, the Global Economic Forum and others show that empowering women is one of the most effective paths for alleviating poverty and other conditions that contribute to instability, while helping to build stronger democracies and strengthen the global economy.

Providing opportunities for women and girls to learn, to earn and to participate in public decision making helps reduce violence, strengthen democracies and improve economies. Worldwide, women who operate small businesses are often denied the credit, and legal and property rights they need to grow their businesses. As women gain access to these benefits, their businesses are able to prosper, improving economies and strengthening the global marketplace.

In countries that have ratified CEDAW, women have partnered with their governments to engage in a national dialogue about the status of women and girls, and as a result have shaped policies to create greater safety and opportunity for women and their families. For example:

- **Educational opportunities** – e.g., Bangladesh used CEDAW to help attain gender parity in primary school enrollment and has as a goal for 2015, to eliminate all gender disparities in secondary education.
- **Violence against women and girls** – e.g., Mexico responded to a destabilizing epidemic of violence against women by using CEDAW terms in a General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence. By 2009, all 32 Mexican states had adopted the measure.
- **Marriage and family relations** – e.g., Kenya has used CEDAW to address differences in inheritance rights, eliminating discrimination against widows and daughters of the deceased.
- **Political participation** – e.g., Kuwait's Parliament voted to extend voting rights to women in 2005 following a recommendation by the CEDAW Committee to eliminate discriminatory provisions in its electoral law.

## The United States and CEDAW

The Obama Administration strongly supports ratification, and has included CEDAW as one of five multilateral treaties it has identified as a priority. The U.S. played an important role in drafting CEDAW, which the United Nations adopted in 1979 and President Carter signed in 1980.

CEDAW has been favorably voted out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee twice with bipartisan support (in 1994 and 2002), with certain conditions known as reservations, understandings and declarations (RUDs) attached to the treaty. It has never been brought to the Senate floor for a vote.

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*For more information, contact June Zeitlin, Director of the CEDAW Education Project for the CEDAW Task Force at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, at 202-263-2852 or [zeitlin@civilrights.org](mailto:zeitlin@civilrights.org). For more information, visit: [www.CEDAW2010.org](http://www.CEDAW2010.org). October 2010.*