



# AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS OFFICE • 740 FIFTEENTH STREET, NW • WASHINGTON, DC 20005-1022 • (202) 682-1760

## AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION SUPPORTS U.S. RATIFICATION OF THE U. N. CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

June 13, 2002

The American Bar Association welcomes today's Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on the U. N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, or the Treaty on the Rights of Women) as a significant step toward U. S. ratification of the treaty. The ABA strongly urges the Senate to give its advice and consent to ratification as expeditiously as possible this year.

One of the ABA's main goals is to advance the Rule of Law around the world. The ABA believes that international treaties, such as CEDAW, are invaluable tools to help governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals establish laws and policies that protect and respect the rights of all persons, regardless of race, religion, culture, or gender. Most other nations of the world have agreed upon CEDAW as the framework for defining the basic human rights to be afforded women and girls; including rights to equal educational opportunities, access to health care, employment without economic or other discrimination, ownership of property, and participation in all aspects of civic and political life.

In the United States, these rights generally are assumed. In many other countries, however, that is not the case. CEDAW ratification therefore could not come at a more critical, yet propitious, time for the advancement of the Rule of Law around the globe. Senate action now will demonstrate to the world that, despite the events of September 11 and their aftermath, this country remains committed to human rights advancement, encouraging both the further development of emerging democracies and the promise of democratic principles and participatory government in countries where freedom is newly won. Nowhere is the need for such encouragement more evident than in Afghanistan, where the United States has won the fight against a repressive regime, but women and girls are just beginning their struggle to attain their rightful place in society.

As Afghanistan works to rebuild and to restructure its government, CEDAW provides a blueprint for the use of international standards to address women's basic human rights needs and help ensure equality. CEDAW encourages signatories to incorporate the

principle of equality of men and women in their legal systems, abolish all discriminatory laws, and adopt anti-discrimination measures. It underscores the importance of ensuring that nations' laws and constitutions reflect and encompass women's equal role in strengthening nations by guaranteeing them the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of public life. And it recognizes what we all have observed from experience in Afghanistan and elsewhere: women cannot participate fully and effectively in society if they are deprived of educational opportunities, health care, property rights, and means of redress in the courts and at the ballot box. The fact that CEDAW has become an essential tool for promoting women's rights in many of the 169 countries that have ratified it to date is a clear statement of CEDAW's value as a force for change.

Historically, the United States has been a world leader in promoting human rights. The failure to ratify CEDAW damages our ability to encourage other nations to fulfill their responsibilities under the treaty. Ratification in 2002 will send a strong message to the world community that the United States supports human rights for women and girls at home and around the globe. It is time for the United States to take up its leadership role in human rights advancement by ratifying CEDAW now.