

RATIFY THE TREATY FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN



Afghan women and girls forming a wedding procession in Mazar-sharif in Northern Afghanistan © AI

Treaty for the Rights of Women Activist Action Kit

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Activist,

Thank you for joining us and millions of others in the United States who are members of more than 200 leading organizations supporting U.S. ratification of the Treaty for the Rights of Women (the Treaty). This Action Kit will help you to take action, build support, and encourage your Senators to ratify the Treaty for the Rights of Women.

The Treaty for the Rights of Women is the most complete international agreement on basic rights for women. The Treaty is officially known as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The United States played an important role in drafting the Treaty, which 185 nations have ratified as of March 1, 2007. Ironically, the United States is now one of only eight countries that have yet to ratify CEDAW, alongside Sudan, Somalia, Qatar, Iran, Nauru, Palau and Tonga.



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The Treaty for the Rights of Women addresses basic human rights of women and can be a useful tool to:

- Reduce violence against women
- Ensure access to education and health care
- Provide legal recourse against violations of women's human rights

U.S. failure to ratify the Treaty undermines the powerful principle that human rights of women are universal across all cultures, nations, and religions, and worthy of being guaranteed through international human rights standards. It is time to stand firmly for the rights of women internationally by ratifying this Treaty.

This Action Kit will help you:

- Raise public awareness and build support of the Treaty and U.S. ratification.
- Lobby your Senators about why the Treaty is important and urge them to make a statement on the Congressional Record in support of U.S. ratification.

Most importantly, have fun! There are several ways to take action in this Action Kit, and you'll be joining millions of others across the nation who are taking similar actions. For more resources, go to the Amnesty International USA website, www.amnestyusa.org/women/cedaw. Together, we can make a difference for the rights of all women everywhere. Please act now!

Sincerely,

The AIUSA Treaty for the Rights of Women Ratification Team

BACKGROUND

WHAT IS THE TREATY FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN?

The Treaty for the Rights of Women is the most complete international agreement on basic human rights for women. The Treaty is officially known as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. As of March 1, 2007, 185 countries have ratified the Treaty for the Rights of Women.

The Treaty for the Rights of Women addresses basic human rights of women. It can be a useful tool to reduce violence and discrimination against women and girls, ensure girls and women receive the same access as boys and men to education and health care, and secure basic legal recourse to women and girls against violations and abuses of their human rights.

Women around the world have used the Treaty to achieve important reforms in their country that reduce violence and discrimination. Measures have been taken against sex slavery, domestic violence and trafficking of women; millions of girls are now receiving primary education that were previously denied access; women's health care services have improved, saving lives during pregnancy and childbirth; and millions of women have secured essential loans and the basic right to own or inherit property.

Treaty ratification commits nations to take concrete action to improve the status of women and to reverse discrimination and end violence against women in their own country and around the world. For example, ratifying countries commit to:

- Take measures to ensure women can enjoy basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- Establish judicial procedures to ensure the effective protection of the rights of women.
- Take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.
- Submit national reports every four years on measures they have taken to comply with the treaty to protect and promote the rights of women in their country.



The Treaty has always enjoyed bipartisan support in the U.S., but has never come before the full Senate for a vote. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has twice voted favorably – in 1994 and 2002 – with bipartisan support to send the Treaty to the Senate floor for ratification, but the Senate recessed each time before that occurred. The current Committee Chairman, Senator Joseph Biden, supports ratification. It is time for Senators to stand together in support of women and ratify CEDAW.

In 2002, the Bush Administration notified the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the Treaty for the Rights of Women was "generally desirable and should be approved." Later that year, then Attorney General John Ashcroft initiated another review of this Treaty. In February 2007, the Bush Administration indicated that it was not pressing for ratification at this time. The SFRC Chairman, Senator Joseph Biden, supports ratification. It is time for Senators to stand together in support of women and ratify CEDAW.

Ratifying the Treaty is an important tool for building partnerships among nations to end human rights abuses and promote the health and well being of women and girls around the world. As women in the United States take on greater leadership roles and participate in record numbers in local and national elections, it is time for the U.S. government to show the international community that it stands unequivocally for the rights of women internationally by ratifying this Treaty.

THE TREATY AND RIGHTS OF WOMEN WORLDWIDE

Women in countries that have ratified the Treaty for the Rights of Women have acted to:

STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:

- In Uganda, the states and cities have now created programs and policies to campaign against domestic violence, using state funds for the purpose.



PROMOTE GIRLS' EDUCATION:

- India universalized its Integrated Child Development Services program in 1997, after ratification of CEDAW, and girls now account for nearly half of all pre-school children.

IMPROVE HEALTH CARE:

- Argentina, Mexico, and Australia instituted programs to provide health care to indigenous and migrant women.

ENSURE WOMEN'S LEGAL RIGHTS:

- Since 1989, legislation in China has highlighted equality between men and women. Women are now guaranteed joint ownership of marital property and equal inheritance.

IMPROVE WOMEN'S LIVES AT WORK:

- Germany, Guatemala, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom are among countries that have improved maternity leave and child care for working women in accord with Treaty provisions.

THE TREATY AND THE UNITED STATES

The Treaty for the Rights of Women sets out internationally agreed upon goals for women's human rights. The United States played an important role in drafting the Treaty, which 185 nations have already ratified. Ironically, the United States is now one of only eight countries that have yet to ratify CEDAW, along side Sudan, Somalia, Qatar, Iran, Nauru, Palau and Tonga.

This Treaty has enormous support within the United States. Over 200 leading organizations representing millions of people across this country form a strong coalition in support of U.S. ratification. The coalition groups range from Amnesty International and the AARP, to Business and Professional Women USA and the American Association of University Women, to B'nai B'rith International and the American Bar Association. (For a complete list of supporting organizations go to www.womenstreaty.org)

As the leading superpower, U.S. ratification would lend weight to the Treaty and provide support to women seeking reforms in countries around the world. U.S. failure to ratify the Treaty undermines the powerful principle that human rights of women are universal across all cultures, nations, and religions, and worthy of being guaranteed through international human rights standards.



U.S. ratification of this Treaty would make an important global statement about the U.S. joining the international community in support of the most complete international agreement on basic human rights for women. It would also make an important global statement about the U.S. commitment to stopping discrimination and violence against women globally and to improving the status of women internationally.

Ratifying the Treaty will facilitate building partnerships among nations to end human rights abuses and promote the health and well being of women and girls around the world. Ratification would permit the United States to participate in the CEDAW committee proceedings and stand up for the rights of women on a global stage. The U.S. will be in a better position to share best practices by participating in the Treaty process. Until the U.S. ratifies the Treaty for the Rights of Women, our country cannot credibly demand that others live up to their obligations under the Treaty.

The Treaty can help address injustices and abuses and can serve as a guide to solidify and enhance gains made for women and girls around the world. U.S. leadership on this Treaty can support the work of women around the world who invoke the

Treaty to bring about reforms. Without the United States as a party to the Treaty, repressive governments can easily discount the Treaty's provisions.

Women in the United States are increasingly taking on leadership roles and are participating in record numbers in local and national elections. It is time to stand unequivocally for the rights of women internationally by ratifying this Treaty.

TAKE ACTION NOW! CONTACT YOUR SENATORS

Level One: Take Action Now! In order for the Treaty to be ratified, we must get our Senators to support it. Send a message to your U.S. Senators; ask them to support the Treaty for the Rights of Women.

- **Take action online.** Ask your Senators to place a statement on the Congressional record in support of U.S. ratification of the Treaty. Go to www.aiusa.org/women/cedaw and take the online action.
- **Mail a letter to your Senator.** Fill in, print out and mail the sample letter included on P. 12 of this kit. — customize your letter by including the issues you care about most. See the Talking Points and the Background sections of this kit for more information to add to your letter.

Level Two: Requires a bit more time, planning and resources — approximately 2-4 hours. Take further action to make a greater impact. Use the following methods to make your statement loud and clear. Do all Level One Actions – plus - one or more of the below:

- **Call your Senators.** A phone call is a personal and effective way to make your voice heard in Congress. Call your Senators and let them know that U.S. ratification of the Treaty for the Rights of Women is important to you.
 - TIP # 1:** When you call, you should ask to speak to the Senate staffer who handles international human rights. Tell him/her who you are and your address (they care about the views of their constituents).
 - TIP # 2:** Ask them to let the Senator know that you called to urge the Senator to support U.S. ratification of the Treaty for the Rights of Women or CEDAW. Use the Talking Points included on Pg. 9 of this Action Kit.
 - TIP # 3:** Ask that the Senator place a statement in the Congressional Record in support of US ratification of this Treaty.
 - TIP # 4:** Offer to send them more information or a draft statement if that would be helpful to them.
 - TIP # 5:** Thank them for taking the call and let them know that you'd like to follow up in a few weeks.
 - TIP # 6:** That's really all you need to say, but if you'd like to say more, choose your favorite messages from the talking points section of this Action Kit. If you are asked any questions you cannot answer, offer to follow-up with a letter to provide the information. It is important not to argue but to be firm in your beliefs; there is a large amount of misinformation that has been put out by opponents of the Treaty.
 - TIP # 7:** For more information on how to call your Legislator, go to: http://www.amnestyusa.org/activist_toolkit/planevents/samplecall.html.
 - TIP # 8:** After you have called your Senator, email us at cedaw@aiusa.org. Let us know how the call went so we can track the effectiveness of the action.

- **Get members of your community to sign the Treaty Ratification Petition.** Print the petition, included on Pg. 12 of this kit. Take the petition to your school, community center or other public venue. Bring along the Treaty Talking Points and Background sections of this kit (see Pg. 9 and Pg. 4). Ask members of your community to sign the petition, explain why the Treaty needs to be ratified in the U.S.

TIP # 1: You can ask people to sign the Treaty Ratification Petition as you take their photo for the CEDAW Umbrella action! Go to: www.amnestyusa.org/women/cedaw to learn more about the CEDAW Umbrella action.

TIP # 2: You can bring the signed petition to a face to face meeting with your Senators. The petition will help show your Senators how much their constituents care about the Treaty for the Rights of Women. Go to: www.amnestyusa.org/women/cedaw to learn more about visiting your Senators.

- **Plan a face to face meeting with your Senators.** You can find helpful information to get started and set up your Senate meetings by downloading: *Treaty for the Rights of Women Activist Action Kit: Preparing for a Senate Office Visit* (available at: www.amnestyusa.org/women/cedaw).

TIP # 1: AIUSA's Legislative Coordinators (LC) are available to assist you with your lobbying plans and help you coordinate with other groups working on ratification of this Treaty. LCs work with Amnesty's professional legislative advocates, other volunteers and staff to achieve Amnesty International USA's legislative goals. They can provide information, advice and training on working with Senators and Members of Congress.

TIP # 2: LCs can also help coordinate your group's legislative agenda and work with other groups in your congressional district and state. Most states have one Legislative Coordinator who is responsible for the whole state. Call your Regional office at 1-866-A-REGION. Regional office staff can connect you with your state's LC and answer any other questions you may have.

TIP # 3: You can also contact your LC or your Regional office to put you in contact with activists from other organizations in your state. This way, you can build a local coalition effort in support of ratification, organize a delegation for a meeting with your Senators, and organize other joint activities.

UNITED STATES SENATE CONTACT INFORMATION

Senate Website:

You can find your Senator by going to www.senate.gov.

Senate Telephone:

You can call you Senator at (202) 224-3121. A switchboard operator will connect you directly with the Senate office you request.

For correspondence to U.S. Senators:

Office of Senator (Name)
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

For correspondence to Senate Committees:

(Name of Committee)
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

TREATY TALKING POINTS – FOR YOUR SENATOR

- Hello Senator. [Introduce yourself and delegation members.] Thank you for taking the time to talk about the Treaty for the Rights of Women, officially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- I am here as your constituent but also as a member of Amnesty International, a Nobel Peace prize winning organization with an estimated 1.8 million members around the world working to promote and defend human rights. Amnesty International is in the midst of a global campaign to end violence against women and girls, and U.S. ratification of the Treaty for the Rights of Women is important to achieving our objectives.
- You may know that millions of people across this country, who are members of more than 200 leading organizations, are pressing for U.S. ratification of this Treaty. The groups supporting ratification range from Amnesty International to the AARP, to Business and Professional Women USA and the American Association of University Women, to B'nai B'rith International and the American Bar Association.
- We would like to urge you to publicly support the Treaty for the Rights of Women and to ask you to place a statement in the Congressional Record calling for U.S. ratification of this Treaty.
- The Treaty is very important to me because it is the most complete international agreement on basic human rights for women.
- The United States played an important role in drafting this Treaty, which 185 nations have ratified. But our country is now one of eight that have yet to ratify the Treaty, alongside Sudan, Somalia, Qatar, Iran, Nauru, Palau and Tonga.
- Women around the world are victims and survivors of egregious human rights violations and abuses. Violence against women is pervasive throughout the world. Amnesty International has found that discrimination is a root cause for violence and that impunity perpetuates violations and abuses.
- Approximately one in three of the world's women will experience violence in her lifetime, with rates reaching 70% in some countries. The World Health Organization estimates that globally one woman in five will be the victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. And in Africa, it is estimated that one in three women will be raped in her lifetime.
- The Treaty is very important because it addresses basic human rights of women. It can be a useful tool to reduce violence and discrimination against women and girls, ensure girls and women receive the same access as boys and men to education and health care, and secure basic legal recourse to women and girls against violations and abuses of their human rights.
- As the leading superpower, U.S. ratification would lend weight to the Treaty and provide valuable support to women seeking reforms in countries around the world. Without the United States as a party to the Treaty, repressive governments can easily discount the Treaty's provisions.
- The Treaty represents a powerful principle that human rights of women are universal across all cultures, nations, and religions, and worthy of being guaranteed through international human rights standards. Our country should embrace this principle, not undermine it by delaying ratification.
- The Treaty has always enjoyed bipartisan support in the United States, but has never come before the full Senate for a vote. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has twice voted favorably – in 1994 and 2002 – with bipartisan support to send the Treaty to the Senate floor for ratification, but the Senate has recessed each time before that occurred. The Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Joseph Biden, has reiterated his strong supports for ratification of this Treaty. It is time for Senators to stand together in support of women and ratify CEDAW.
- As women in the United States take on greater leadership roles and participate in record numbers in local and national elections, it is time for the U.S. government to show the international community that it stands unequivocally for the human rights of women internationally by ratifying this Treaty.

Finish by restating your main "Ask":

- As your constituent/s, I/ we encourage you to publicly support the Treaty for the Rights of Women and to place a statement in the Congressional Record calling for U.S. ratification of this Treaty.

* Offer to provide a sample/draft statement for your Senator to work from for inclusion in the Congressional Record. For assistance drafting the statement or for help finding additional answers, contact Chris McGraw at AIUSA's Government Relations Program (cmcgraw@aiusa.org or 202.544.0200 ext. 230).

IF ASKED ABOUT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S POSITION:

- Presidents Reagan and George H. W. Bush prioritized ratification of specific human rights treaties, including UN conventions on Genocide and on Civil and Political Rights. President Clinton pressed for ratification of the conventions against torture, against racial discrimination, and on this Treaty.
- In 2002, the Bush Administration notified the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the Treaty for the Rights of Women was "generally desirable and should be approved." Later that year, then Attorney General John Ashcroft initiated another review of this Treaty. In February 2007, the Bush Administration indicated that it was not pressing for ratification at this time. The SFRC Chairman, Senator Joseph Biden, supports ratification. It is time for Senators to stand together in support of women and ratify CEDAW.
- Legal scholars and the Congressional Research Service have determined that the Treaty, as considered by the Senate (with the current package of reservations, understandings and declarations), would not require the passage of new laws.

IF ASKED ABOUT THE CEDAW COMMITTEE:

- The CEDAW Committee is advisory in nature. Lack of U.S. ratification prevents the United States from participating in the CEDAW committee proceedings and building partnerships among nations to end human rights abuses and promote the health and well being of women and girls around the world. The U.S. will be in a better position to share best practices by participating in the Treaty process.
- Until the United States ratifies the Treaty for the Rights of Women, our country cannot credibly demand that countries with weak human rights records and that are notorious for abuses against women live up to their Treaty obligations for improving conditions for women. U.S. actions and policies have far-reaching consequences in signaling issue priorities to other countries and to the international community.
- U.S. ratification of this Treaty would make an important global statement about the U.S. joining the international community in support of the most complete international agreement on basic human rights for women. It would also make an important global statement about the U.S. commitment to stopping discrimination and violence against women globally and to improving the status of women internationally.

IF ASKED ABOUT ABORTION:

- Despite misinformation, the Treaty does not address abortion (– it's not in the Treaty). In many ratifying countries, abortion is illegal. The Treaty is silent on the topic, leaving it to each government to determine policies and laws regarding this issue. The U.S. State Department has concluded in its previous review that the Treaty is "abortion neutral."
- Dozens of countries that prohibit abortion or severely restrict it have ratified this Treaty without any reservations on this topic.

SAMPLE - LETTER TO YOUR SENATORS

Support the Treaty for the Rights of Women!

The Honorable [NAME OF SENATOR]
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

[DATE SUBMITTED]

Dear Senator:

As your constituent and a strong believer in advancing women's human rights around the world, I urge you to support U.S. ratification of the Treaty for the Rights of Women, officially known as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). 185 nations have already ratified this important Treaty. However, the United States is one of only eight countries yet to ratify CEDAW, alongside Sudan, Somalia, Qatar, Iran, Nauru, Palau and Tonga.

This Treaty has enormous support within the United States. Over 200 leading organizations representing millions of people across this country form a strong coalition in support of U.S. ratification. The coalition groups range from the AARP and Amnesty International, to Business and Professional Women USA and the American Association of University Women, to B'nai B'rith International and the American Bar Association.

Women around the world are victims and survivors of egregious human rights violations and abuses. Violence against women is pervasive throughout the world. Amnesty International has found that discrimination is a root cause for violence and that impunity perpetuates violations and abuses. Approximately one in three of the world's women will experience violence in her lifetime, with rates reaching 70% in some countries. The World Health Organization estimates that globally one woman in five will be the victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. And in Africa, it is estimated that one in three women will be raped in her lifetime.

Ratification of the Treaty by the U.S. Senate would serve as a tool to fight violence and discrimination against women and girls wherever they face abuse. Around the world, millions of women are abused each year, often in countries where they face discriminatory laws preventing them from seeking meaningful legal recourse against such violence.

The Treaty for the Rights of Women can be a useful tool to reduce violence against women and other human rights abuses by reversing discrimination and providing equal protection before the law. The Treaty can also help ensure girls and women receive the same access as boys and men to education and basic health care, and that they have basic legal recourse against violations and abuses of their human rights. The United States should be consistent in its leadership and should proudly stand at the forefront of human rights for women around world.

I appeal to you to stand publicly for women everywhere in defense of their human rights by inserting a statement in the Congressional Record expressing your steadfast support of women's human rights and calling for U.S. ratification of the Treaty for the Rights of Women.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]
[ADDRESS CITY, STATE AND ZIP CODE]

