

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

...because Women's Rights are Human Rights

About CEDAW: The Treaty for Women's Equality

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, also known as the Treaty for Women's Equality, 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; guarantee the right to vote; ensure the ability to work and own a business without discrimination; improve maternal health care; end forced marriage and child marriage; promote sustainable agriculture practices; and ensure inheritance rights.

To date, 187 countries have ratified CEDAW. The United States is one of only seven countries -- including Iran, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Palau and Tonga -- that have not ratified CEDAW.

CEDAW strengthens the United States as a global leader in standing up for equality 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.

Ratification requires two-thirds of the Senate to stand together for women's equality and has no additional financial cost.

CEDAW Works: Invest in Women, It Pays

It is now recognized that empowerment of women is central to building democratic, peaceful and prosperous societies. The World Bank provided substantial documentation of the important role that women play when it released its 2012 *World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development*. According to the report, "CEDAW has improved women's literacy levels, labor force participation rates, and parliamentary representation -- and in some cases has reduced absolute gender inequalities."

The report demonstrates 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. As women gain access to these benefits, their businesses are able to prosper, improving economies and strengthening the global marketplace. The April 2013 Harvard Business Review featured research on the economics of equality, confirming this link between women's rights and economic participation.

In countries that have ratified CEDAW, women have partnered with their governments to engage in a national dialogue about advancing equality for 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** –Bangladesh used CEDAW to help attain gender parity in primary schools and has a goal to eliminate all gender disparities in secondary education. In India, the courts have relied on CEDAW and other international norms for interpreting fundamental rights expressly guaranteed in the Constitution of India that embody the basic concept of gender equality in all spheres.
- **Violence against women and girls** – Indonesia passed legislation to combat violence against women, provide for victim protection and to protect women in the workforce.
- **Marriage and family relations** – Egypt reformed its nationality law to enable women as well as men to pass on their nationality to their children.
- **Political participation** –Kuwait’s Parliament voted to extend voting rights to women in 2005 and beginning with the election in 2009, women have been elected to the Kuwait Parliament.
- **Property and inheritance** – Kenya used CEDAW to address differences in inheritance rights, eliminating discrimination against widows and daughters of the deceased.

The United States and CEDAW: The Treaty for Women’s Equality

Advancing women’s equality 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 opportunities. Ratifying the Treaty for Women’s Equality 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 and to end child marriage.

While American women enjoy opportunities and status not available to most of the world’s women, few would dispute that more progress is needed. CEDAW would provide an opportunity for national dialogue on how to address persistent gaps in women’s full equality, particularly regarding closing the pay gap, reducing domestic violence and stopping trafficking. Ratifying CEDAW does not automatically result in changes to U.S. law or additional costs. It is up to each country to determine how to bring its policies in line to eliminate discrimination against women and girls.

The Obama Administration strongly supports ratification of CEDAW. The treaty has been favorably voted out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee twice with bipartisan support (in 1994 and 2002). However, CEDAW has never been brought to the Senate floor for a vote. In 2010, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law, chaired by Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL), held a hearing on CEDAW. In 2011, Senate Foreign Relations subcommittees, chaired by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Robert Casey (D-PA), held a hearing on Women and the Arab Spring, which highlighted how CEDAW has been used in the Middle East and North Africa to advance equality for women and girls.

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