



As members of the environmental community in the United States, we write to strongly support Senate approval and U.S. ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Women's rights and environmental protection are inextricably linked. Ratification of CEDAW would help alleviate the harmful environmental and health conditions under which women live and work and would increase their capacity to fight environmental degradation.

Environmental degradation and diminishing resource access disproportionately affect women as they manage household activities, including gathering water and firewood. Increasing deforestation compels women and girls in developing countries to walk increasingly greater distances to collect firewood. Similarly, drought conditions and poor water quality force women to find alternative water sources. Due to their specific susceptibilities to the toxic effects of chemicals in air, water and soil, women suffer from numerous health problems, including high breast cancer and compromised reproductive health. Ingestion of these chemicals by mothers can, in turn, impact the health of children.

Women often play a key role in achieving environmental protection. For example, women have taken the lead in integrating environmental protection and democratization as part of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya. It is inconceivable that sustainable development—which integrates protection of human health and the environment as essential components—can be achieved without involving women fully and equally in the process. It goes without saying that achieving sustainable development, democracy and stability in other countries, not to mention greater human rights and equality, is in the United States' interest.

Advancing women's rights and achieving a better environmental future are closely linked. When women are treated equally and fairly, have the right to own land and are legally protected from violence, they are better able to participate in their communities and in critical decision-making about natural resources. When women have access to basic healthcare and education, population growth rates slow and families and the environment tend to be healthier.

CEDAW was finalized in 1979, 23 years ago. Since then, 170 countries have ratified it. The United States is the only industrialized country that has not done so. Ratification of CEDAW will not require a single change in U.S. law. However, by providing greater attention and resources to women's rights issues, it will improve the lives of millions of women around the world who cannot legally own land and who do not have the right to an equal education or healthcare - - and ultimately help protect the global environment for our families and our shared future.

Sincerely,

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