



The CEDAW Treaty: Ending Discrimination Against Women

The CEDAW Treaty

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is a landmark international agreement that affirms principles of fundamental human rights and equality for women around the world. CEDAW offers countries a **practical blueprint to achieve progress for women and girls** by calling on each ratifying country to overcome barriers to discrimination.

CEDAW **strengthens the U.S. 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. To date, 186 out of 193 countries have ratified CEDAW. Unfortunately, the **U.S. is one of only six countries**—including Iran, Sudan, Somalia, and two small Pacific Island nations—**that have not ratified CEDAW.**

To ensure that women enjoy the same basic rights and fundamental freedoms as men, CEDAW seeks to:

- end sex trafficking, domestic abuse, and violence against women
- 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
- ensure inheritance rights
- end forced marriage and child marriage

Benefits of U.S. Ratification of CEDAW

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. In fact, The United States ranks low (27th) among industrialized countries on many comparative measures of women's well-being.

The U.S. and CEDAW

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

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.

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 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** – 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** – 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** – Kenya has used CEDAW to address differences in inheritance rights, eliminating discrimination against widows and daughters of the deceased.
- **Political participation** – 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.

Why CEDAW Can't Wait

The ratification of CEDAW by the U.S. is both **urgent and necessary**. Every day women in the international community are denied equal access to the resources and rights to which they are entitled. CEDAW implementation can address and ultimately eradicate such inequalities on a global level. Now exists the **opportunity in the U.S.** to capitalize on this far-reaching support and **finally ratify CEDAW**.

For more information, please contact our Outreach Department at outreach@globalsolutions.org.