



**Testimony for the Record
Citizens for Global Solutions**

Before:

**Senate Committee on the Judiciary,
Subcommittee on Human Right and the Law**

***“Women’s Rights are Human Rights: U.S. Ratification of the Convention of the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)”***

November 18, 2010

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Coburn, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our statement for the record and for conducting this very important hearing on “Women’s Rights are Human Rights: U.S. Ratification of the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).”

Citizens for Global Solutions is proud to be a national member-driven movement that empowers and educates people to be engaged global citizens. We envision the United States actively pursuing a just and peaceful world through cooperative global decision making. The CEDAW Treaty is an important part of our vision as it strengthens the United States as a global leader working cooperatively to stand up for women and girls around the world.

Citizens for Global Solutions serves as the co-chair of the CEDAW Task Force, a broad-based, diverse coalition coordinated by the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights and made up of over 170 organizations. As members of the Task Force, our organizations have come together to increase the visibility of CEDAW and to build a greater understanding among policymakers and the public about the need, importance and impact of the United States’ ratification of CEDAW. We thank the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law for convening this hearing and turning its attention to CEDAW.

Citizens for Global Solutions’ membership stretches across the country and cares very passionately about both CEDAW and the status of women and girls around the world. In the last year they have sent thousands of email messages, handwritten letters, phone calls and postcards to their Senators in support of CEDAW.

Many of our members remember when CEDAW was passed by the United Nations and are astounded that thirty years later the United States still has not ratified this important blueprint for progress for women and girls around the world. Eight years ago, when the last hearing on CEDAW was held, our members mobilized and activated to ensure their voices were heard. Now they are ready to do it again because they know that CEDAW is a critical human rights treaty that the United States must ratify.

Building Peace, Justice and Freedom in a Democratically Governed World

CEDAW is a pragmatic international agreement addressing the rights of women and girls. The treaty was passed by the UN General Assembly on December 18, 1979, and was signed by President Carter on behalf of the United States in 1980. While 186 nations have ratified CEDAW, unfortunately, the U.S. has failed to do so and is keeping company with known human rights violators including Sudan, Somalia, and Iran.

CEDAW strengthens the United States as a global leader in standing up for women and girls. In countries that have ratified CEDAW, women have partnered with their governments to improve the status of women and girls, and as a result have changed laws and policies to create greater safety and opportunity for women and their families. CEDAW can make a difference for women and girls, specifically to reduce sex trafficking and domestic violence, provide access to education and vocational training, ensure the right to vote, end forced marriage and child marriage, help mothers and families by providing access to maternal health care and to ensure the right to work and own a business without discrimination.

The American public strongly supports the principles and values of equality, fairness, education, and basic human rights. In the United States, CEDAW has been voted on favorably twice on a bipartisan basis by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but still CEDAW has never been brought to the full Senate floor for a vote. Ratification of CEDAW now would continue America's proud bipartisan tradition of promoting and protecting human rights. Congress has the full support of the Obama Administration in making this a reality. According to Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, *"The CEDAW Treaty [is] the most authoritative UN negotiated treaty to protect women around the world from discrimination. The United States signed this agreement in 1980. It is past time that we became a party to this convention."*

The ratification of CEDAW will directly benefit the American people. For example, in 1998, San Francisco adopted a Municipal Ordinance based on CEDAW, which incorporated key human rights principles into law. Pursuant to that Ordinance, city and county government programs in San Francisco are required to take all necessary measures to prevent all forms of discrimination against women and girls. A gender analysis tool was created and program and policy reviews were undertaken by local agencies and departments. After its review, the Department of Public Works improved city lighting because it recognized that good streetlights were important to prevent violence against women, who are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault, and the lighting provided an important benefit for all. As a state party to CEDAW, the U.S. will commit to preparing comprehensive reports on the status of women and girls in the county. (The U.S. already routinely develops these reports for other ratified treaties.) Undertaking this broad analysis is an important vehicle for identifying areas of improvement and increasing awareness of conditions that may have a unique impact on women.

The 2008 World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report placed the United States 27th in overall gender equity. The United States ranks low among industrialized countries on many comparative measures of women's well-being, such as maternal and infant mortality, health care, and women's political participation, among others. For example, based on the September 2010 Census, women who work full-time still earn only 77 cents to every dollar men earn. With ratification of CEDAW, the status of women could be improved in many ways.

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CEDAW will provide an additional tool for addressing the problems that women and girls still face in the U.S. While women in the U.S. enjoy opportunities and status that are not available to many women in other parts of the world, few would dispute that more progress is warranted. For example:

Domestic violence: The federal Violence Against Women Act (“VAWA”), originally passed in 1994, has enhanced the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of violence against women, and provided multi-faceted services for victims of family violence and sexual assaults. In addition, all of the fifty states and the District of Columbia have their own laws outlawing violence against women, including domestic abuse, and provide a range of protections and services to battered women. However, domestic violence remains a serious problem in the U.S., with an average of four women per day murdered and 5.5 million women per year physically assaulted or raped by intimate partners (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2009). CEDAW’s commitment to ending violence against women would reinforce our efforts.

Trafficking: The U.S. has taken a strong stand against trafficking with the enactment of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which provides stiff penalties for traffickers, assists and protects victims, and commits funding to anti-trafficking efforts in the U.S. and abroad. Nevertheless, some estimates suggest that there may be 20,000 women, men, and children trafficked into the U.S. each year, which are forced to labor under slavery-like conditions. CEDAW ratification would serve to strengthen the existing U.S. commitment to preventing the trafficking of women and children, and providing services and access to justice to trafficking victims attempting to rebuild their lives.

Pay Discrimination: Women now constitute half of the workforce in the U.S., but women working full-time today earn, on average, only 77 cents for every dollar paid to men. This is especially harmful given that women are the primary breadwinners in nearly four in 10 families. CEDAW recognizes that ending discrimination against women in the workplace includes fair pay for their work. Ratification of CEDAW would encourage efforts to close this gap.

School dropouts: Girls are not denied access to education in the U.S. However, one in four high school girls in this country drops out before graduation, and those girls have an average annual income that is \$9,100 below the low wages earned by boys who drop out. CEDAW specifically calls for reducing girls’ dropout rates and for helping those who have left school, and its ratification would encourage the development of programs to address the dropout problem.

Discrimination in Education. CEDAW asks countries to provide equal rights for women in all aspects of education. In career and technical (previously known as vocational) education, girls in this country are still conspicuously absent from classes that prepare students for higher-paying, traditionally male occupations, such as electricians and automotive technicians. In higher education, women are only a small percentage of those studying and teaching physical and computer sciences and engineering. CEDAW would provide a stimulus for greater focus on these disparities and increased enforcement of antidiscrimination laws, and for efforts among educators and government officials to eliminate barriers and encourage girls and women to develop their interests in non-traditional areas.

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Ratification would enhance U.S. credibility in the global community and its ability to speak out on behalf of women in nations that have ratified the convention but still limit a woman's right to education, to vote, to own property or to seek protection under the law from violent domestic abuse. Non-ratification has created a climate of diplomatic isolation and has stunted our foreign policy interests. The U.S. cannot play an effective role in promoting and protecting women's human rights until it ratifies this treaty.

Further, U.S. ratification of CEDAW would entitle the United States to nominate an expert to be a member of the CEDAW Committee, which monitors implementation and progress of the treaty. As a member of the committee, the U.S. expert would bring the benefit of the U.S. experience in combating discrimination against women to this international forum. CEDAW's near universal ratification demonstrates that human rights are a matter of international and not simply domestic concern.

The U.S. becoming a party to CEDAW is a critical and necessary step forward for promoting the rule of law and protecting human rights around the world. Everyday women in the world are denied equal access to the resources and rights to which they are entitled, and the implementation of the treaty seeks to eradicate such inequalities on a global level. CEDAW has broad support from over 170 leading advocacy organizations, including the AARP, American Association of University Women, and the American Bar Association. Now is the opportunity to capitalize on this far-reaching support and finally ratify CEDAW.

No international human rights treaty can be truly effective without strong support from the United States - and CEDAW is no exception. Through ratification of CEDAW, the U.S. will enhance its moral authority - in both words and actions - that the rights of women and girls are crucial. Ratification will make our nation an even stronger leader in standing up for women and girls. In conclusion, the U.S. Congress must act now to protect the rights of women and girls around the world by supporting the ratification of the CEDAW treaty.