

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 (CEDAW) is a landmark international agreement that affirms principles of fundamental human rights and equality for women around the world.

To date, 187 out of 193 United Nations member states have ratified CEDAW. The United States is one of only six countries—along with Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Palau and Tonga—that have not ratified CEDAW.

CEDAW defines discrimination and provides a practical blueprint to promote human rights and open opportunities for women and girls in all areas of society. The treaty calls on each ratifying country to overcome barriers to discrimination in the political, social, economic, and cultural fields. This includes addressing issues of domestic violence, trafficking, affordable health care and child care, economic security, pay inequities, paid family leave, and educational and vocational opportunities.

CEDAW Works: Investing in Women Around the World

The 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.”

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. See ICRW report on Recognizing Rights Promoting Progress at www.cedaw2015.org.

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

American women enjoy opportunities and status not available to most of the world’s women, yet few would dispute that more progress is needed. CEDAW provides an opportunity for dialogue on how to address persistent gaps in women’s full equality, particularly regarding closing the pay gap, reducing domestic violence, and stopping trafficking.

National Action: Although President Obama supports ratification of CEDAW, the treaty has not moved beyond hearings in the Senate Judiciary and Foreign Relations Committees during his administration.

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.

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, two Senate Foreign Relations subcommittees, chaired by Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Robert Casey (D-PA), held a joint 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. More recently, in June 2014, a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee chaired by Senator Boxer held a hearing on Combating Violence and Discrimination Against Women: A Global Call to Action, which cited the importance of CEDAW for women around the world, including in the United States.

However, CEDAW has never been brought to the Senate floor for a vote. To ratify the treaty, CEDAW needs to be voted on by the full Senate, where it requires a two-thirds majority of support, or 67 votes. The House of Representatives has no formal role.

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights convenes a CEDAW Task Force of almost 200 national organizations that continues to engage in educating policy makers and the public on the benefits of U.S. ratification of CEDAW.

Local Action: With CEDAW ratification efforts stalled in the U.S. Senate, local activists and public officials around the country are joining together in the *Cities for CEDAW* campaign to adopt local measures reflecting CEDAW principles as a way to address barriers to full equality for women and girls. Such measures generally require a gender analysis of city operations (e.g., workforce, programs, budget); an oversight body to monitor the implementation of a local CEDAW ordinance, (e.g., Commission on the Status of Women, Human Rights Commission, etc.); and funding to support the implementation of CEDAW principles.

Much is being done at the local level to promote the importance of the treaty. In 1998, San Francisco became the first city in the United States to adopt an ordinance reflecting the principles of CEDAW to improve the lives of women and girls. Since its adoption, San Francisco has developed new initiatives on domestic violence homicide, human trafficking, family friendly workplaces, and expanded language access for responders to domestic violence. More information can be found regarding the Top 10 Achievements of the San Francisco CEDAW Ordinance at www.cities4cedaw.org.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors adopted a resolution in 2014 in support of the *Cities for CEDAW* campaign. Local activists and government officials are working in their communities to secure and implement a local CEDAW ordinance. The Women's Intercultural Network (WIN) in San Francisco and The Leadership Conference, a national coalition of diverse civil and human rights organizations, are working together to assist activists in communities around the country interested in the Cities for CEDAW campaign.¹

¹ More information can be found at either the Women's Intercultural Network (WIN) (www.citiesforcedaw.org); or The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (www.civilrights.org). Contacts for each organization follow, respectively:

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