

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

...because Women's Rights are Human Rights

The Case for U.S. Ratification

1. A Vote for CEDAW is a Vote for Women.

- More voters than ever across the ideological spectrum support healthier, more secure lives for women and girls in the United States and around the world. The CEDAW Treaty offers a practical blueprint to achieve progress and its principles are in accord with U.S. laws. Ratification has no cost and does not require budget outlays.
- Ratification would reaffirm that members of the U.S. Senate can work together to support nonpartisan, fundamental American values that are also universal values: security, fairness, opportunity, responsibility and freedom. Sixty-seven votes are needed in the U.S. Senate to ratify the CEDAW Treaty.
- Under the leadership of Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton, the U.S. ratified similar treaties addressing genocide, torture, race, and civil and political rights. Ratifying CEDAW would continue that important tradition and demonstrate America's continuing commitment to equal opportunity for women and girls.

2. U.S. Ratification of CEDAW Would Send a Strong Signal to Other Governments that Protecting Women's Human Rights is a Global Priority.

- Currently, the United States cannot participate in the one global forum exclusively focused on women's human rights around the world. Ratifying CEDAW would allow the U.S. to have a seat at the table, share its expertise with other countries seeking greater equality for women and girls and benefit from their experiences.
- 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 fight violence and oppression. Ratification would amplify the U.S. voice in support of women and girls in Afghanistan, Iraq, Congo, Haiti and elsewhere.

3. CEDAW Works. It Improves the Lives of Women and Families, Strengthens Communities and Nations, and Contributes to U.S. National Security.

- The World Bank, World Economic Forum and other organizations have documented that empowering women is one of the most effective paths for development. Investing in women by providing opportunities for women and girls to learn, to earn and to participate in public decision making helps reduce violence, alleviate poverty, build democracies and strengthen economies.
- Ratifying CEDAW can help strengthen the world economy. 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 ratifying countries, women have partnered with their governments to change their laws and policies, creating greater safety and opportunity for women and their families:
 - Pakistan introduced co-education in primary schools in 1996-97 after CEDAW ratification and saw sharp increases in girls' enrollment.

- 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.
- Kenya has used CEDAW to address differences on inheritance rights, eliminating discrimination against the widow and daughters of the deceased.
- 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.

4. U.S. Ratification of CEDAW Creates an Opportunity for a National Dialogue on the Status of Women and Girls in the United States.

- American women enjoy opportunities and status not available to most of the world's women. But few would dispute that more progress is needed. While ratifying CEDAW does not automatically result in changes to U.S. law, it creates an opportunity for a dialogue on how to address persistent gaps in women's equality in areas such as:
 - *Domestic violence*: the landmark Violence Against Women Act, has done much to prevent domestic violence and meet the needs of victims, yet two million women a year report injuries from current or former partners in the United States.
 - *Maternal health*: the United States ranks 41st among a ranking of 184 countries on maternal deaths during pregnancy and childbirth, below all other industrialized nations and a number of developing countries.
 - *Economic security*: U.S. women continue to lag behind men in income, earning on average only 77 cents for every dollar that a man makes.
 - *Human trafficking*: the Trafficking Victims Protection Act has played a pivotal role in combating human trafficking. However, estimates suggest that there may be 20,000 women, men, and children trafficked into the U.S. each year.
- In sum, ratification of CEDAW would provide an effective catalyst for the U.S. to engage in a systemic analysis of persistent discrimination against women, highlighting where more attention is needed and helping to develop strategies to move forward.

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