

CEDAW

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Purpose - The treaty, often called the “Bill of Rights for Women”, provides an international standard for protecting and promoting women’s human rights and is the only international instrument that comprehensively addresses these rights; affirming that women have equal human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, and civil field.

Ratification - The United States is the only western country and the only industrialized democracy that has not ratified CEDAW. Of the 192 U.N. members, 186 countries have ratified the treaty placing the U.S. in the company of a handful of countries such as Iran, Sudan, and Somalia.

Background – The United States was instrumental in drafting the treaty which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and signed by President Carter on July 17, 1980. In 1994 and 2002, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted favorably for ratification, but the treaty has never come before the full Senate for a vote.

Considerations - The principles espoused in the treaty are consistent with those in US law and in domestic and foreign policy objectives. The treaty would nonetheless help efforts to enhance US laws with respect to violence against women, access to legal protections and other human rights. US ratification would strengthen CEDAW as an instrument in support of women’s struggles to achieve full protection and realization of their rights at home and abroad. It would enable the US to participate directly in the global dialogue between nations about ways to ensure women’s access to equality.

- The stated policy of the United States is equal opportunity and equality before the law. Ratification of the convention is a credible manifestation of this policy.
- The US has recently assisted Afghanistan and Iraq to form new governments and in both cases; recognition of equal rights for women as a fundamental human right was a major US priority. The US should lead by example, lest it be open to charges of hypocrisy in this regard.
- By ratifying CEDAW, the US will have greater political clout to reassert its natural role as a champion of human rights worldwide.
- The treaty enjoys popular bi-partisan backing across the country being supported by; AARP, the American Bar Association, the League of Women Voters, National Council of Churches, YWCA, American Jewish World Service, United Methodist Church, to name just a few. In addition many states and local governments have endorsed CEDAW.

Recommendations – The US Senate should finally ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and ratification should proceed without “Reservations, Declarations and Understandings” (RDUs) that would undermine CEDAW’s meaning and effectiveness.