

CEDAW, formally known as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, is a landmark international agreement that affirms principles of fundamental human rights and equality for women and girls. Signed by President Jimmy Carter in 1979, it is among President Obama's top three treaty priorities.

CEDAW ratification would strengthen the United States as a global leader in standing up for women and girls. It would amplify the U.S. voice in defending women's human rights around the world, continuing that proud tradition. Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton ratified similar agreements on torture, genocide and race; the American public strongly supports the principles and values of education, equality, fairness and basic human rights that CEDAW embodies.

CEDAW is fully consistent with U.S. laws and would not require any appropriations or force any changes on U.S. citizens. Rather, CEDAW offers a blueprint that decision-makers in any country can choose to use to build equal rights for women and girls into law and policy. At a time when girls are denied education or forced into marriage in many countries, and when violence against women is at epic proportions, especially during conflict situations, women's advocates and legislatures have used the CEDAW model to argue for progress.

For example, Kuwaiti women gained the right to vote after calling on the government to live up to CEDAW terms. Morocco and Kenya approved laws against forced and child marriage and ensured women's inheritance rights; Bangladesh guaranteed women access to education and vocational training. Nepal and Mexico took steps to reduce sex trafficking and curb domestic violence. While U.S. women are far better off than women in many countries, they still earn less than men for comparable work and know that in the corporate world, glass ceilings are largely intact. CEDAW ratification would strengthen their case for equal treatment.

World Bank studies have shown that promoting women's equality and human rights is fundamental to America's national security and economic interests worldwide. Yet the United States is one of only seven countries among the United Nations' 193 members that have not ratified CEDAW – along with Sudan, Somalia, Iran and the three small Pacific Island nations of Palau, Nauru and Tonga. This is a global embarrassment.

The United States of America is unique in its intellectual, religious, and political heritage. Ours was the first nation founded on the principles of the Enlightenment. Those principles have formed the foundation of our great power and prosperity and allowed our society to progress beyond the best hopes of the founding fathers. Our evolving commitment to democracy, universal suffrage, and individual rights have influenced scores of nations hoping to mimic our success.

In keeping with that tradition, Institute for Science and Human Values unreservedly asks the United States Senate to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) now.

Since its adoption in 1981, the world has used CEDAW as a tool to help eliminate sex

trafficking, disproportionate violence against women, forced marriage and child marriage, childbirth fatalities, and workplace discrimination against women. Countries that recognize the wisdom of the principles of CEDAW have expanded education opportunities for their girls and extended suffrage to women.

The United States of America is a champion of women's rights, but even within our own borders many of these issues are not completely resolved. Critics have contended that accepting CEDAW is tantamount to ceding national sovereignty; but in choosing to follow our principles we exercise our free will, expand our choices, and multiply our prosperity. As the only democracy in the world to reserve ratification of this convention we are denying our own citizens the benefits it could bestow. Worse, we are in discord with our moral foundation, eroding our status as a moral leader and giving cover to repressive regimes like those in Iran, Somalia, and Sudan that are opposed even in principle to progress.

This link will provide the herstory of CEDAW since its inception.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/history.htm>