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Physicians for
Human Rights

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



A Fact Sheet

CEDAW is the most comprehensive women's rights treaty in the world, acknowledging the political, civil, economic, cultural, and social rights of women. The treaty creates international gender equality standards, to which 186 countries have agreed, excluding the United States of America, Iran, Nauru, Palau, Somalia, Sudan, and Tonga.

CEDAW considers discrimination against women to be "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex" (Article 1). The Convention addresses a woman's right to:

- Legal representation and protection
- Education both academic and recreational, as well as resources to allow for effective learning
- Work, to pursue employment opportunities of one's choice; maternity leave with pay and employers special consideration and equal treatment of women at work during pregnancy
- Health care
- Individual autonomy in matters of nationality and movement, including the right to live free from forms of physical violence such as domestic violence and rape.

Why SHOULD the United States Ratify CEDAW?

- CEDAW's definition of discrimination sets a universal standard
- Women would have equal economic rights in financial matters such as mortgages, bank loans, and salary
- A woman would not be inhibited from achieving her academic potential by gender biased educational policy
- US laws against violence and discrimination against women would be strengthened
- The US would be acknowledged as a credible world leader of human rights

CEDAW Making Change: Real World Examples of policies and initiatives that improve the lives of women and girls

Refer to "Human Rights For All" edited by Leila Rassekh Milan, and UNIFEM's "Bringing Equality Home" edited by Ilana Landsberg-Lewis, for more information.

IMPROVING WOMEN'S LEGAL RIGHTS:

- Brazil, Columbia, Uganda, and South Africa have made constitutional changes that reflect the equal rights of women, disallowing discrimination based on gender;

- over twenty state parties to CEDAW have modified or adopted laws and policies to reflect human rights standards that are gender neutral
- In Nepal, a Supreme Court case sought to overturn a law that severely restricted a daughter's ancestral property entitlements; as CEDAW is considered national law in Nepal, this case has led to ongoing discussion about the status of women's human rights
 - San Francisco adopted the principles of CEDAW in 1998; CA state law and policy was subsequently reviewed to identify and eliminate discrimination against women
 - After the ratification of CEDAW, many legal cases have been brought to high courts on the grounds of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, seeking a ruling that upholds CEDAW standards of women's human rights

IMPROVING WOMEN'S WORKING CONDITIONS:

- Calling upon its international obligation to honor the equal rights of women, Australia passed national legislation against sexual harassment in the workplace
- Countries such as Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the UK, the Philippines and Guatemala have modified employment laws to allow for improved maternity leave and child care provisions

ADVOCATING FOR BETTER GIRLS' EDUCATION:

- Slovenia and Switzerland have created new school admission policies to increase access for girls
- India's Integrated Child Development Services plan conceived in 1975 acknowledges the systematic discrimination of young girls and has developed a childcare program that became universalized in 1997 to cater to both girls and boys

STOPPING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:

- Columbia and Uganda have worked to advocate against domestic violence by either creating laws to protect female victims of violence or by using state funds to support social programs and campaigns
- Costa Rican courts can lawfully order an abusive spouse to leave his home while providing economic assistance to support the family; heightened sensitivity to victims of sex crime, has led to training programs and especially designated women officials to deal with investigations

IMPROVING STANDARDS AND ACCESS OF HEALTH CARE:

- In 1992, the Colombian government issued the "Health for Women, Women for Health" policy, recognizing health as a human right's issue and worthy of a gendered perspective
- The Philippines has created a Maternal Health Care Program for women
- Argentina, Australia, and Mexico have created programs to increase the standard of health care for indigenous and migrant women

Full Text of CEDAW: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>