

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

With its incredible long and descriptive name CEDAW is exactly what it says it is -- ***the only international human rights treaty that comprehensively addresses the fundamental rights of women and girls in political, legal, economic, cultural, social, and family life***, and in 186 countries around the world that have ratified it, the Treaty has become a crucial tool for addressing the lives and well-being of women and girls.

**History of CEDAW:** The UN adopted CEDAW on December 18, 1979. Often called the international “Bill of Rights” for women, it is the culmination of more than 30 years of work by the UN Commission on the Status of Women and its member countries and country states. The creation of this Treaty was the first critical step in developing a standard of basic human rights for women. As of May 2010, 186 countries have ratified the Treaty.

**Status in US:** In order for the US to ratify an international treaty, two-thirds of the Senate must consent – that is 67 “yes” votes. No action is required by the House of Representatives. Ironically, although the US was instrumental in drafting CEDAW, it is one of the few nations that have yet to ratify the Treaty. A broad coalition of US non-governmental organizations is engaged in outreach efforts and public education to achieve ratification.

**Why is CEDAW important?** Nations that ratify CEDAW commit to overcoming barriers to discrimination against women in the areas of legal rights, education, employment, health care, political life and finance. It sets out “best practices” for ensuring basic human rights for women without imposing any laws on governments. Domestic laws take precedence everywhere. The Treaty has proven to be a valuable tool for governments wanting to improve their own laws by broadening the basic rights of women.

**Why is US ratification important?** The United States has a bipartisan tradition of support for international standards through human rights treaties. Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton ratified similar treaties on genocide, torture, race and civil and political rights. Ratification of CEDAW would continue that proud tradition.

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The United States has long been a world leader on human rights. US failure to ratify the treaty allows other countries to divert attention away from their neglect of women and undermines the powerful principle that human rights of women are universal across all cultures, nations, and regions.

The U.S. already has laws consistent with the CEDAW Treaty. Under the terms of the Treaty, the U.S. would submit regular reports to an advisory committee, which would provide an important opportunity to raise up our best practices and assess where we can do better.

**Myths about CEDAW:** Many myths are being circulated by opponents of ratification. It is important to understand those and answer them:

- The Treaty grants no enforcement authority to the United Nations or any other body.
- No changes in US domestic law would be required for the US to be in Treaty compliance.
- The Treaty does not require countries to send women into combat.
- The Treaty does not prohibit single-sex schools – it seeks equal education facilities and opportunities.
- The Treaty intentionally does not address the issue of abortion.
- The United States would not have to abandon Mother's Day!

**Who else, in addition to the US, has not ratified CEDAW?**

Iran, Palau, Tonga, Somalia, and Sudan.

**What can you do to support CEDAW?** Join the Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN) in educating Senators on the importance of CEDAW. Call and write your members of Congress to let them know how important ratification of CEDAW is to women in the United States and around the world.

**Interested in hearing more about important issues like this?** Join the EPPN to receive regular updates and opportunities to take part in advocacy. **You can join online at**

<http://episcopal.grassroots.com>

Or by filling out the form below and returning it to:

**EPPN, 110 Maryland Ave., NE Suite 309, Washington, DC 20002**

**Name :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City, State Zip :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

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