

CEDAW

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

WHAT IT DOES: The goals of “The Treaty for the Rights of Women” or “CEDAW” are to abolish discrimination against women in political, cultural, family life, economic, and social arenas. The Treaty seeks to end trafficking of women and violence against women, and to establish equality for women in public life, education, employment, health care, law, and property.

SOME HISTORY: The convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was adopted by the United Nations on December 18, 1979 and has been ratified by 177 countries.

- **1980:** President Jimmy Carter signed the treaty but the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations declined to seek ratification.
- **1990:** The Senate Foreign Relations Committee holds a hearing on the Treaty.
- **1993:** Sixty-eight senators write President Bill Clinton requesting treaty ratification.
- **1993:** The United States Commits to ratifying CEDAW at the U.N. World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna Austria.
- **1994:** The Clinton administration recommends ratification.
- **September 1994:** The Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 13 to 5 to recommend treaty passage by the full Senate. Several senators put a “hold” on it for the duration of the 103rd Congress, thereby blocking the treaty ratification vote on the Senate floor.
- **2002:** Gaining momentum again, the treaty was voted favorably out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for a second time by a bipartisan vote of 12 to 7 on July 30, 2002. However, an overcrowded fall Senate schedule prevented the treaty from being considered by the full Senate. It again failed to be ratified.
- Still in **2002:** The Bush administration fails to take a formal position on the treaty.

The US is among a small minority of countries that have not ratified the treaty including: Iran, Sudan, and Somalia.

CEDAW provides a universal definition of discrimination against women. It establishes rights for women in areas not previously subject to international standards. By not ratifying CEDAW, the U.S. compromises its credibility as a world leader for Human Rights.

After ratification in 1982, Columbia has created protections for women who are abused by their husbands and partners.

After ratification in 1993, in India, domestic violence has been recognized as a widespread problem.

Fact and Fiction:

Fiction: The ratification of CEDAW would lead to foolish laws and frivolous lawsuits.

Fact: The treaty is non-self executing and would not authorize any new lawsuits not already allowed under the U.S. law.

Fiction: The treaty will destroy traditional families by redefining “family” and the roles of women and men.

Fact: The treaty does not seek to regulate family life. It only urges governments “to adopt education and public information programs [to] eliminate prejudices and current practices that hinder the full operation of the principle of the social equity of women.”

Fiction: CEDAW supports abortion due to the fact that it urges access to family planning.

Fact: The U.S. State Department has concluded that CEDAW is “abortion neutral.” The U.S. has already drafted an “understanding” to CEDAW, clarifying that it does not include a right to abortion.

CEDAW provides a powerful tool for holding governments accountable for improving the status of women.

Fiction: The treaty will require legalization of prostitution.

Fact: The treaty does not legalize prostitution. The CEDAW committee has recommended the decriminalizing of prostitution specific countries, allowing victimized women to come forward without fear of sanctions for treatment to prevent HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Fiction: the treaty will threaten single-sex schools and require “gender-neutral” textbooks.

Fact: Single-sex schools are not prohibited. Education equity language refers to the need for equal educational facilities, texts and other materials for girls and boys, whether taught in single-sex or co-educational schools.

As a result of ratification, in France, a 1999 constitutional amendment requires political parties to include 50% of women candidates on party lists submitted for election.