

CALL FOR UNITED STATES RATIFICATION OF CEDAW

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In league with a multitude of progressive organizations, the US Women and Cuba Collaboration calls for the long overdue ratification by the US Senate of CEDAW, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Since its adoption by the UN General Assembly in 1979, the world has for the first time an international treaty that recognizes discrimination against women as a human rights violation, a treaty that has been signed and ratified by a majority of the countries of the world. The US is one of only eight countries—as of August 2009—that have failed to ratify CEDAW (in the company of Iran, Nauru, Palau, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan and Tonga). President Carter signed CEDAW in 1980, so the US is the only country to have signed, but not ratified, the treaty.

The US Women and Cuba Collaboration is committed to work in global alliances that advance the status of women everywhere, and CEDAW is a critical tool—locally, nationally, globally—for building inclusive and progressive women's movements, including networks for justice, real security and women's rights. Crucially, CEDAW addresses women's rights in both public and private spheres, and it challenges nations to engage gender analysis as necessary to creating just and equitable public policies. Because the US has not ratified this treaty, the standing and the voices of US citizens working for justice in this nation are compromised in the global arena. US ratification will make a powerful statement about US commitment to improving the situation of women nationally and internationally.

No RUDs: We call for a “clean” CEDAW, not a version amended by the US that is compromised by “reservations, understandings and declarations.” President Obama supports CEDAW, but he gave the treaty to the Department of Justice for review to decide whether to attach conditions before it goes to the Senate (as the Jesse Helms-led Senate Foreign Relations Committee had done in the past). We believe that RUDs are not compatible with the mandate of equality in CEDAW. Like other human rights treaties ratified by the US, CEDAW includes a declaration that the treaty is non-self-executing, meaning that specific legislation is required to implement its vision. Subsequent legislation is the place to work out issues raised by proposed RUDs; RUDs within the treaty are unacceptable and contrary to its nature.

Immediate US ratification of CEDAW matters because:

1. The treaty will address injustices to women and their human rights and can set parameters to solidify and increase progress in gender equity for women and girls in the US and globally.
2. The treaty will help the United States measure progress toward goals such as ending sexual harassment and violence, assuring equality in schools and the workplace, and improving maternity leave and child care.
3. US ratification of CEDAW will improve the status of women in the US, and as well it will improve the status of the treaty itself because of the standing the US has as a world superpower.
4. With ratification, US credibility globally will be enhanced when it speaks as a leader in human rights; the US will have a voice in CEDAW committee proceedings to stand up for the rights of women globally.
5. Being a signatory to the treaty will facilitate partnership-building among nations, and the US will be in a better position to share best practices. The US has compromised standing to ask other nations to live up to treaty goals until we ratify the treaty.
6. Ratification will give lie to groundless fears about the treaty that are based upon false assumptions. For instance, the treaty does not promote abortion (even the State Department has formally acknowledged that CEDAW is “abortion neutral.”) Ratifying CEDAW involves making reports on compliance with the treaty, but it does not require the US to change its laws. Many US laws are already consistent with CEDAW.
7. The work of women's equality in the US is not finished and ratification will encourage the US to further improve strategies to reduce discrimination against women using a set of international standards asking it to take affirmative steps of its choosing to ensure all US women can fully participate in society.

Sources and Resources:

Amnesty USA
womenstreaty.org/actionkit.pdf
amnestyusa.org/women/cedaw

Marjorie Cohn, “Obama: Ratify the Women's Convention Soon”
truthout | Perspective

Tanya Doriss, “Crib Sheet: UN Convention on Ending
Discrimination Against Women” (Copyright © The Nation)

Betsy Reed, “A ‘Clean’ CEDAW” (Copyright © The Nation)

Working Group for Ratification of CEDAW
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