

## **WHAT IS CEDAW?**

CEDAW is short for the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and provides a universal standard for women's human rights. It addresses discrimination in areas such as education, employment, marriage and family relations, health care, politics, finance and law.

## **WHY IS CEDAW IMPORTANT?**

From the AAUW website, the Treaty for the Rights of Women addresses basic human rights of women and can be a useful tool to:

- Reduce violence against women
- Ensure access to education and health care
- Provide legal recourse against violations of women's human rights

Importantly, 185 nations have ratified this treaty as of March 1, 2007. Eight countries in the world have not signed on: United States, Sudan, Somalia, Qatar, Iran, Nauru, Palau and Tonga.

U.S. failure to ratify the Treaty undermines the powerful principle that human rights of women are universal across all cultures, nations, and religions, and worthy of being guaranteed through international human rights standards.

## **HOW DOES CEDAW WORK?**

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women consists of 23 experts on women's rights from around the world. According to the UN website, countries who have signed on to the treaty must submit reports on how the rights of the convention are being implemented. The Committee formulates general recommendations and suggestions.

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/index.htm>

## **HOW IS AAUW INVOLVED?**

AAUW passed the CEDAW resolution at the National Convention in Phoenix in June, 2007. AAUW fully supports CEDAW. Members are encouraged to write to their US senators regarding ratification and to participate in the efforts of the "Working Group on the Ratification of CEDAW". The resolution in its entirety can be found at

[http://www.aauw.org/About/international\\_corner/upload/AAUW-Convention-Resolution.pdf](http://www.aauw.org/About/international_corner/upload/AAUW-Convention-Resolution.pdf)

A complete resource kit is available from the National AAUW website at

[http://www.aauw.org/About/international\\_corner/CEDAW-Resource-Kit.cfm](http://www.aauw.org/About/international_corner/CEDAW-Resource-Kit.cfm)

## **BHUTAN and CEDAW**

Judi Polizzotti, Connecticut AAUW's Membership Vice President submitted this report about how the small country of Bhutan is implementing CEDAW.

On Thursday July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009, at the invitation of Carolyn Donovan AAUW representative to the UN, I attended the **United Nations 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**. In 2008, AAUW gained consultative status with the ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) which initiates reports, makes recommendations, and promotes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The new designation allows AAUW to participate in international conferences, sign on to NGO statements, and share AAUW's expertise. AAUW observes the proceedings, advocates for women's rights and keeps its members informed of international issues.

AAUW continues to **support ratification of the women's rights treaty CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women)**. In July of 1980, President Carter signed the treaty called an international treaty of women's rights. But as of today, Congress has not moved on ratification. However, at the CSW meeting in March a State Department representative of the Obama administration stated that it is a priority. Therefore, at this point the US does not participate or have a member on the committee.

The CEDAW Committee consists of [23 experts](#) on women's rights from around the world. At this meeting in the session which lasted from July 20<sup>th</sup> to August 7th, Bhutan and Japan reported on their progress in women's rights. The Kingdom of Bhutan signed CEDAW on July 17, 1980 and ratified it on August 31, 1981. Bhutan's first written Constitution was adopted exactly a year ago by the first elected Parliament. In the opening statement H.E. Lyonpo Ugyen Tshering, Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs, suggests that it is largely human rights based. It established the **Gross National Happiness Commission** and **National Commission for Women and Children** which **supports gender mainstreaming**.

**It is important to consider that Bhutan, as a newly formed democratic constitutional monarchy, has signed and ratified the international treaty for women's rights. This not only requires periodic reports on its progress but requires a commitment to submit a program of implementation with specific timeframes.**

Currently, in Bhutan's Parliament, there are 13.88% women. This is not a significant percentage but women were 52% of total voters in the last elections.

Again Bhutan is a mostly rural country with a newly formed democracy. To illustrate this point, H.E. Lyonpo Ugyen Tshering related his visit to the village of a member of parliament. "It took me five days to walk to the village and when I arrived I visited for two more days to make the most of my time with the member and rest for the walk back".

In questions by the committee, representatives were asked to report on human trafficking, child care and violence against women. It was stressed by the representative that Bhutan was engaged with NGOs in implementing many aspects of women's rights.

Dressed in colorful native silk tunic the Foreign Minister responded to questions in a calm yet concerned voice conveying the struggle involved in balancing efforts to promote women's rights with a desire to preserve his country's unique culture. For example, to the question of human trafficking, the Minister responded that "if someone were missing they would be known by all." In a country where people have lived in small villages for generations, the concept of a child gone missing without the knowledge of the community is non-existent. Yet, in today's changing global society, new migrant workers from India are changing the social makeup of the country.

In comparison, the report by Japan highlighted cultural and economic differences between Japan as an industrialized world power and the developing country of Bhutan. Despite these differences, both countries face the impacts of globalization with an increase in migrant workers and changes in cultural values.

The caliber of representatives sent to the meeting, (Bhutan's foreign minister and Japan's Member of House of Councilors, Chieko Nohno) reflected both government's commitment to the process of promoting women's rights. In her opening statement, Chieko Nohno, suggested that the progress of gender equality in Japan was slow. Primary factors were "stereotyped perception of gender roles, difficulty in balancing work and family life and working women's concerns about the development of their careers".

In terms of women in politics, in the 242 member Diet, Japan's two chamber legislative body, 33 were women or 14%. Many women are employed in the manufacturing sector and many work part time and there is also a significant wage gap. Abortion is also criminalized in Japan.

Japan's reporting also touched on equal opportunity in employment, support for balancing work and family, violence against women, human trafficking and support for "women facing difficulties in life, due to single parent families, domestic violence unstable employment and foreigners living in Japan".

In my opinion, progress in women's rights is attained by having a nation bear witness to its record of human rights. It indicates a desire to be a model of modernity in the global community.