

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. Why Should the United States Ratify CEDAW?

A. CEDAW strengthens the United States as a global leader in standing up for women and girls. CEDAW is a landmark international agreement that affirms principles of fundamental human rights and equality for women and girls.

CEDAW is a practical blueprint for each country to achieve progress for women and girls. The American public strongly supports the principles and values of equality, fairness, education and basic human rights.

Almost all countries have ratified the CEDAW agreement – 187 out of 193 countries have ratified. Only six have not ratified, including the United States, Sudan, Somalia, Iran, and two small Pacific Island nations (Palau and Tonga).

Women around the world are calling for U.S. ratification of the CEDAW treaty to send a strong signal to other governments that women's rights are human rights. Ratification would add the United States' influential voice when the United Nations discusses the status of women and girls in places such as Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Ratification of CEDAW would continue America's proud bipartisan tradition of promoting and protecting human rights. Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton achieved ratification of similar agreements on torture, genocide, and race discrimination.

Ratifying CEDAW is an effective way to support women and girls, and there are no additional costs or new appropriations required with ratification. It is up to policymakers and advocates in each ratifying country to work together to determine how best to achieve the principles of CEDAW to end discrimination and ensure greater equality for women and girls.

Q: How Does the Treaty Work?

A. Countries that ratify the CEDAW treaty commit to take action to end discrimination against women and girls and affirm principles of fundamental human rights and equality for women and girls.

The Treaty offers a practical blueprint to achieve progress and ensure basic human rights for women. CEDAW is very clear that it is up to each country to determine how best to bring their policies and laws in line with ending discrimination against women and girls.

In countries that have ratified CEDAW, women have partnered with their governments to improve conditions for women and girls in a range of areas, such as the following:

- Reducing violence against women and girls, including stopping sex trafficking and domestic violence and recognizing sexual assault and rape as crimes.
- Providing educational opportunities, including access to education and vocational training.
- Ensuring political participation, including the right to vote, serve on juries, and hold public office.
- Ending forced marriages and child marriage, and ensuring that women have a right to inherit property.
- Helping mothers and families by providing access to maternal health care.
- Ensuring the ability to work and own a business without discrimination.

Q. Is CEDAW Relevant Across the Many Different Cultures?

A. Yes. CEDAW is one of the world's key human rights treaties and cannot be misconstrued as a "western" ideal only. The CEDAW treaty has been ratified by 186 out of 193 countries. Only seven countries have not yet ratified CEDAW: the United States, Iran, Somalia, Sudan, and three small Pacific Island nations (Nauru, Palau, and Tonga).

Q. What Success Has CEDAW Had in Other Countries?

A. In countries that have ratified CEDAW, women have partnered with their governments to engage in a national dialogue about the status of women and girls, and as a result have shaped policies to create greater safety and opportunities for women and their families. For example:

- Educational opportunities – e.g., Bangladesh used CEDAW to help attain gender parity in primary school enrollment and has as a goal for 2015, to eliminate all gender disparities in secondary education.
- Violence against women and girls – e.g., Mexico responded to a destabilizing epidemic of violence against women by using CEDAW terms in a General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence. By 2009, all 32 Mexican states had adopted the measure.
- Marriage and family relations – e.g., Kenya has used CEDAW to address differences in inheritance rights, eliminating discrimination against widows and daughters of the deceased.
- Political participation – e.g., Kuwait's Parliament voted to extend voting rights to women in 2005 following a recommendation by the CEDAW Committee to eliminate discriminatory provisions in its electoral law.

Q. What Is the Process for Ratification?

A. In the United States, ratification of international treaties requires two-thirds of the Senate (67 of 100 Senators) to vote in favor of the treaty, providing the Senate's advice and consent for ratification. But before an international treaty reaches the Senate floor, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee typically reviews international treaties and votes to send it forward for a consideration by the full Senate. Then the president signs the treaty and ratification is complete. Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton achieved ratification of similar agreements on torture, genocide, and race discrimination. Ratification of CEDAW would continue America's proud bipartisan tradition of promoting and protecting human rights.

Q. How Would CEDAW Affect U.S. Laws?

A. American women enjoy opportunities and status not available to most of the world's women, but few would dispute that more progress is needed at home in certain areas, such as ending domestic violence and closing the pay gap. Ratifying CEDAW would not result in any automatic changes to U.S. law. CEDAW provides an effective blueprint to achieve progress for women and girls and an opportunity for policymakers and advocates to work together on how best to end discrimination and ensure women's full equality, for example in areas such as:

- *Domestic violence:* the landmark Violence Against Women Act, has done much to prevent domestic violence and meet the needs of victims, yet two million women a year report injuries from current or former partners in the United States.
- *Maternal health:* the United States ranks 41st among a ranking of 184 countries on maternal deaths during pregnancy and childbirth, below all other industrialized nations and a number of developing countries.
- *Economic security:* U.S. women continue to lag behind men in income, earning on average only 78 cents for every dollar that a man makes.
- *Human trafficking:* the Trafficking Victims Protection Act has played a pivotal role in combating human trafficking. However, estimates suggest that there may be 20,000 women, men and children trafficked into the U.S. each year.

Ratification of CEDAW would provide a catalyst for the U.S. to examine areas of persistent discrimination against women and develop strategies for solutions.

Q. What is the role of the CEDAW Committee?

A. Each country decides how best to achieve implementation. The CEDAW Committee has no enforcement authority; it can only make recommendations highlighting areas where more progress is needed in a particular country.

Countries that ratify CEDAW agree to take all appropriate measures to implement the treaty's provisions. Ratifying countries submit a report on how they are implementing the treaty one year after ratification, then every four years thereafter. The CEDAW Committee reviews each report and comments on each country's progress.

The CEDAW Committee is comprised of 23 independent experts who are nominated and elected by ratifying countries to serve a four-year term.

Q. Who Supports CEDAW?

A. The Obama administration strongly supports ratification and has included CEDAW as one of five multilateral treaties that are a priority. In the U.S. Senate, the CEDAW treaty has been voted favorably out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee twice with bipartisan support: in 1994 with a vote of 13-5 and in 2002 with a vote of 12-7. It has never been brought to the Senate floor for a vote.

The American public strongly supports the principles and values of equality, fairness, education and basic human rights. Millions of Americans are represented by the over 150 national, state and local organizations that are united in support of CEDAW. The groups include a broad range of religious, civic, and community organizations, such as the American Bar Association, Amnesty International USA, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, NAACP, the National Council of La Raza, National Council of Churches Women's Ministries, National Education Association, The United Methodist Church, Sisters of Mercy, and the YWCA.