

eliminating racism empowering women

ywca

CEDAW

The Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the most comprehensive international agreement on basic human rights of women. Created in 1979, CEDAW is regarded as the most important international mechanism for women's equality. The treaty addresses physical, sexual, economic, and political abuses against women and promotes women's equality of rights and well-being. This treaty holds that basic human rights for women should be universal across cultures and religions.

In its over 25 years, CEDAW has provided a vehicle for ratifying countries to overcome barriers of discrimination. Its 185 ratifications make it the second most widely ratified human rights treaty. The treaty has created a platform for activists to advocate for change in their national institutions to protect themselves from discrimination.

Because of the CEDAW Treaty, millions of girls are now receiving primary education who were previously denied access; measures have been taken against sex slavery, domestic violence and trafficking of women; women's health care services have improved, saving lives during pregnancy and childbirth; and millions of women have secured loans or the right to own or inherit property. Around the world, the status and rights of women are linked to a broad array of critical global issues including disease prevention, democratization, poverty reduction, environmental protection and economic development and growth. CEDAW is about helping women and girls lead healthier, more secure lives.

The U.S. is one of eight countries that has not ratified CEDAW. The U.S. failure to ratify the treaty allows countries which have weak human rights records to neglect and undermine human rights for women. This is because without ratification, our country cannot credibly demand that others live up to their obligations under the treaty.

The most common arguments against ratification include sovereignty and abortion. Opponents have warned that once ratified, this treaty would usurp the power of the U.S. Constitution and our federal laws. However, the U.S. has ratified several human rights treaties in the past 25 years with no sovereignty implications. Opponents also argue that ratification would ease existing abortion regulations. The treaty does not take a position on abortion. Countries where abortion is illegal, such as Ireland and Rwanda, or strictly limited, have ratified this treaty with no effect to their abortion laws.

YWCA Position

YWCA supports ratification of CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. YWCA supports measures to ensure human rights for women and girls around the world.