

## **Summary of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**

**Article 1:** Defines discrimination against women as any "distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of marital status, on the basis of equality between men and women, of human rights or fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field."

**Article 2:** Mandates concrete steps, implementing laws, policies and practices to eliminate discrimination against women and embody the principle of equality.

**Article 3:** Requires action in all fields - civil, political, economic, social, and cultural - to advance the human rights of women.

**Article 4:** Permits affirmative action measures to accelerate equality and eliminate discrimination.

**Article 5:** Recognizes the role of culture and tradition, and calls for the elimination of sex role stereotyping.

**Article 6:** Requires suppression of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitutes.

**Article 7:** Mandates ending discrimination against women in political and public life.

**Article 8:** Requires action to allow women to represent their governments internationally on an equal basis with men.

**Article 9:** Mandates that women will have equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality and that of their children.

**Article 10:** Obligates equal access to all fields of education and the elimination of stereotyped concepts of the roles of men and women.

**Article 11:** Mandates the end of discrimination in the field of employment and recognizes the right to work as a human right.

**Article 12:** Requires steps to eliminate discrimination from the field of health care, including access to family planning. If necessary, these services must be free of charge.

**Article 13:** Requires that women be ensured equal access to family benefits, bank loans, credit, sports and cultural life.

**Article 14:** Focuses on the particular problems faced by rural women.

**Article 15:** Guarantees equality before the law and equal access to administer property.

**Article 16:** Requires steps to ensure equality in marriage and family relations.

**Article 17:** Calls for the establishment of a committee to evaluate the progress of the implementation of CEDAW.

**Article 18-30:** Set forth elements of the operation of the treaty.

Summary from [www.wildforhumanrights.org](http://www.wildforhumanrights.org).

# The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CEDAW

- CEDAW is a comprehensive bill of rights for women.
- CEDAW was adopted by the United Nations in 1979.
- To date, 170 countries have ratified or “acceded” to CEDAW.
- The United States is one of few countries that has not ratified CEDAW.
- There is currently a national campaign for the United States to ratify CEDAW.
- The implementation of CEDAW is monitored by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women—also known as CEDAW.
- The CEDAW committee consists of 23 independent experts who represent the range of fields covered by CEDAW as well as equitable geographical distribution.
- Countries that ratify CEDAW are required to report to the Committee one year after ratification, and thereafter every four years.

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS** are statements on the meaning of the provisions of CEDAW with respect to the rights of women and the obligations of the States. CEDAW now has 24 General Recommendations including GR 19 which deals with gender-based violence against women.

**RESERVATIONS** are formal declarations that a country does not accept as binding a certain part or parts of the treaty. Unfortunately, most countries ratify UN treaties with reservations.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CEDAW TO WOMEN

- CEDAW has a broader definition of discrimination than is provided by New York City’s human rights law. This definition can be used to enhance existing law to address policies that inadvertently have the effect of discriminating against women.
- Endorses the adoption of proactive measures to ensure the equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms by women vis-à-vis men.
- Goes beyond guaranteeing rights for women to provide mechanisms to ensure the realization of those rights. It is concerned with *de facto* equality.
- Requires governments to not only prevent and prohibit discrimination, but also provide redress when discrimination occurs.

## THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO CEDAW

- The Optional Protocol allows individual women whose rights under CEDAW have been violated to bring their claims for review by the CEDAW committee. Their governments will in effect have to answer to such claims at the international level.
- The Optional Protocol is a separate (and optional) treaty that is open to ratification by countries that are already party to CEDAW.
- 39 countries have already ratified or acceded to the Optional protocol to CEDAW.

**Internet Resources** (Information on this sheet adapted from these sources)  
Convention—<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/e1cedaw.htm>. Committee—<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/cedw.htm>  
Local Implementation of CEDAW—<http://www.wildforhumanrights.org>