



Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

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The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), U.S. Section, calls upon **the U.S. Senate to immediately ratify the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).**

This year marks the 31st anniversary of the CEDAW Convention, the historic international bill of rights for women's human rights. As an international non-governmental organization with UN consultative status, WILPF was a vital part of the decades-long process culminating in the adoption of the CEDAW Convention. In 1974, WILPF formally instructed its sections in various countries to engage their governments in the crafting of an international human rights convention which would "bring together the various aspects of women's rights to form international law," because we understood that "only through the intensive participation of women can best possible development in each country . . . and world peace [be] achieved."

The CEDAW Convention was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 18, 1979 and signed, on behalf of the United States, by President Jimmy Carter in 1980. Yet, thirty-one years later, this powerful treaty has yet to be ratified by the U.S. Senate. **The US is the only country to sign but not ratify the Convention.**

As of today, 186 countries are state parties to the Convention. By requiring states to take affirmative measures, the CEDAW Convention charts an agenda for action to ensure women's rights to full participation in civic, political, economic, social, and cultural life, and to live free of gender-based violence in their private and public life, including in the context of armed conflict. In line with these principles, the United States has affirmed Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace, Security, which both condemn gender and sexual violence in conflict and outline women's critical role in crafting and sustaining viable conflict prevention and resolution strategies to lasting peace. Neither goal can be achieved without a strong commitment to respecting and ensuring women's human rights to participate as equal partners in constructing and reconstructing society.

Like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, **the CEDAW Convention seeks to eliminate discrimination in order to protect human dignity and fulfill society's potential to provide for the well being of all people.** Like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the CEDAW Convention aims to remedy inequality resulting from institutional policies and practices which either in effect or intentionally undercut equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The CEDAW Convention is an essential addition to both documents, as it shines a much-needed spotlight on the human rights of women and girls everywhere.

The CEDAW Convention provides an internationally-recognized framework to assist the United States in engaging with other countries, such as Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. **The United States will also benefit from implementing CEDAW's provisions domestically.** Women's and other civil society organizations in the United States have already begun applying CEDAW's principles in areas as diverse as education, healthcare, public safety, paid and unpaid work, corporate and military practices, housing, environmental policy, and childcare.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom values freedom of thought and of expression as a means of realizing human potential. The CEDAW Convention, in integrating the provisions of key international human rights instruments, recognizes that freedom of thought and expression can be repressed not just by police action but also by social isolation and lack of access to the basic goods necessary to sustain life. We therefore assert our understanding of and support for CEDAW as the most comprehensive and integrated codification of the full range of women's human rights, including the rights to bodily integrity, to sexual autonomy, to form families of one's own choosing without coercion, and to an environment clean enough to support healthy lives, not just for ourselves but for all the generations to which we might give birth. **The right to define one's own identity and aspirations lies at the very heart of the quest for freedom, and for world peace.**

In addition to urging immediate ratification of CEDAW, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, call upon the President and U.S. Senate to:

- 1) ensure that U.S. foreign policy reflects respect for and compliance with all international human rights and humanitarian treaties to which the U.S. is a party;
- 2) continue to ratify international human rights treaties on a timely basis so that the U.S. no longer trails behind other countries in understanding of and adherence to internationally normative standards and practices;
- 3) create a federal program to adequately fund human rights education in all public elementary and secondary schools; and
- 4) draw on the knowledge and experience of local human rights and civil society organizations when compiling human rights performance reports for submission to international treaty monitoring bodies.

By immediately ratifying CEDAW the United States can show that it is serious about its commitment to the world's women and to constructive engagement with the governments of individual countries and through the United Nations.