

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
Twenty-fifth anniversary of its adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations
Commemorative Round table
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The 25th anniversary of the adoption of CEDAW by the General Assembly provides an important opportunity to reflect on the significance and impact of this unique Convention. While the Convention focuses on the rights of women, the realization of these rights extends far beyond the woman herself, to her family, her community, her nation, and humanity as a whole. As many studies have shown, the advancement of women is linked with improved living standards, health, education, increased entrepreneurship and foreign investment. Indeed, the full emancipation of women is no less than a prerequisite for the social and economic conditions capable of bringing about global peace and prosperity.

I want to take this opportunity to applaud the dedicated work and courage of the CEDAW committee, in addressing the challenges of the governments before them. Members of the committee have shown tremendous patience and encouragement towards member states working to bring their laws into compliance with CEDAW. I would particularly like to commend the Committee for the way they have reached out to and welcomed the contributions of NGOs. The Committee has invited NGOs to consult with them, has supported their extensive work on the ground, and has urged member states to work with and draw on NGOs' expertise in their efforts to advance the position of women. I would also like to recognize the Division for the Advancement of Women and UNIFEM for their instrumental role in facilitating NGOs' contributions to CEDAW, through financial, technical, and capacity building measures. With CEDAW as the cornerstone of its programs, UNIFEM has forged important partnerships between women's NGOs, governments, and the UN, most recently starting a major four-year program to strengthen the implementation of CEDAW in Southeast Asia.

CEDAW has been critically important for NGOs. It has provided NGOs with a recognized standard and a framework for articulating specific rights, which have empowered and emboldened NGOs in their work with governments. NGOs have taken an active role in the reporting process, providing alternative reports and comments on the reports of their respective countries, advocating for the withdrawal of their country's reservations, monitoring provisions for gender equality in national constitutions and pushing further for their full implementation.

In the 25 years since its adoption, 178¹ countries have ratified the convention and many have taken the necessary measures to condemn and eliminate legislative discrimination against women. Others, because of reservations or by failing to ratify the convention, have regrettably delayed the advances necessary to bring about the emancipation of fully half of their nations' citizens. The time has come for governments to recognize the universality of this law and of human rights in general and, in keeping with the ve their reservation quickly and confidently towards full ratification and implementation. The question of women's

¹ As of October 5, 2004. [<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states.htm>]

rights is not only a legal and political one – the recognition of and accordance of rights to women is a moral imperative. Countries have no less than a moral obligation to recognize the rights of women as equal citizens and bring about the necessary conditions for their equal participation in all facets of society.

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recognized over half a century ago, the “inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family,” the road to the r