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The Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Zonta Advocacy for U.S. Ratification February 2007

Zonta Action

In 2002, the Zonta International Legislative Awareness and Advocacy Subcommittee with the International United Nations Committee called on Zontians in the United States to send messages to their Senators encouraging them to support CEDAW's ratification. This call to action represented a continued commitment to the resolution passed at Zonta International's 2000 Convention stating the resolve of Zonta International to work toward the ratification of CEDAW and the implementation of the Convention. As of 2 Nov 2006, **185** countries - over ninety percent of the members of the United Nations - are party to the Convention. An additional State has signed, but not ratified, the treaty; therefore it is not bound to put the provisions of the Convention into practice. The U.S. is the only industrialized nation that has not ratified the treaty.

What is CEDAW?

CEDAW, also known as the Women's Treaty, was adopted by the United Nations in 1979 as a way to guarantee women's rights that were not previously subject to international standards. The treaty aims to end all forms of discrimination against women and achieve equality between the sexes in all fields of civil, political, social, economic and cultural life.

What is CEDAW's Status in the U.S.?

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed the treaty, thereby indicating the United States' intent to ratify the Convention and informally agreeing to abide by the provisions in the treaty while it awaits ratification. Due to political wrangling, CEDAW failed to come to the full Senate floor for over 20 years. In July 2002, under the leadership of Chairman Joseph Biden (D-DE), the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted favorably on the treaty by a vote of 12 to 7. Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Joseph Biden urged U.S. ratification of CEDAW at a Congressional briefing on Oct. 8, 2002. The Senate adjourned in 2002 without time for a vote on ratification. In November 2002, the treaty reverted back to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee under the leadership of the new chairman Richard Lugar (R-IN). In November 2006 Joseph R. Biden (D-Del.) was again named Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. This committee must vote again to bring the treaty before the full Senate for a vote on ratification. In order for the treaty to be ratified in the United States, 2/3 of the Senate must vote in favor of ratification. As of 6 February 2007 U.S. ratification of CEDAW is not on the agenda of Senate. No action is required from the House of Representatives.

Why It Matters

The United States has long been considered a leader in the area of human rights. Ratifying CEDAW sends the message that the United States puts a high value on women's human rights. Failure to ratify the treaty may damage the United States' position on advocating for women's rights in other parts of the world.