

CEDAW



The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

What is CEDAW?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

The Convention 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 their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

By accepting the Convention, States commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including:

- to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women;
- to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
- to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.

The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life -- including the right to vote and to stand for election -- as well as education, health and employment. States parties agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Convention is the only human rights treaty which affirms the reproductive rights of women and targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations. It affirms women's rights to acquire, change or retain their nationality and the nationality of their children. States parties also agree to take appropriate measures against all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of women.

Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.

Women Discrimination

Gender equality is essential for the achievement of human rights for all. Yet discriminatory laws against women persist in every corner of the globe and new discriminatory laws are enacted. In all legal traditions many laws continue to institutionalize second class status for women and girls with regard to nationality and citizenship, health, education, marital rights, employment rights, parental rights, inheritance and property rights. These forms of discrimination against women are incompatible with women's empowerment.

Women form the majority of the world's poorest people and the number of women living in rural poverty has increased by 50% since 1975. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours and produce half of the world's food, yet they earn only 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property¹. Violence against women throughout the world and in all cultures prevails on an unimaginable scale, and women's access to justice is often paired with discriminatory obstacles – in law as well as in practice. Multiple forms of discrimination based on gender and other factors such as race, ethnicity, caste, disability, persons affected by HIV/AIDS, sexual orientation or gender identity further compounds the risk of economic hardship, exclusion and violence against women.

In some countries women, unlike men, cannot dress as they like, drive, work at night, inherit property or give evidence in Court. The vast majority of expressly discriminatory laws in force relate to family life, including limiting a woman's right to marry (or the right not to marry in cases of early forced marriages), divorce and remarry, thus allowing for sex discriminatory marital practices such as wife obedience and polygamy. Laws explicitly mandating "wife obedience" still govern marital relations in many States.

Thirty years since the Convention's entry into force, the recognition and enjoyment of equal rights with men still remains elusive for large sections of women around the world.

All women deserve a life with the opportunity to be educated, to work, to be healthy and to participate in all aspects of public life.

TOPICS

Topic A: Forced Marriages

What is a forced marriage?

They may have been emotionally blackmailed, physically threatened or abused.

Forced marriages differ from arranged ones, which may have been set up by a relative or friend, but are willingly agreed to by the couple.

An indication of being made to marry someone against their will is 'a feeling', says Sue from Central Manchester Women's Aid. "You know from a young age whether you can say yes or no to your parents.

"And on the day of the ceremony, it is extremely difficult for anyone to say no when everything has been organised."

Some young people, especially of South Asian origin, have been taken on visits to the subcontinent by their families, unaware of plans to marry them off. Passports have been confiscated to prevent them returning home.

Those who either have been or fear being forced into marriage can become depressed and frightened, develop mental and physical health problems and harm themselves.

A number of those trying to escape unwanted unions have even become victims of honour-based violence or committed suicide.

No major world faith advocates forced marriages although some may try to justify it on religious grounds.

The practice crosses boundaries of culture and class and happens worldwide, but it especially concerns those living in and originating from Asia.

"It's tradition, not religion, that is the problem," says Jasvinder Sanghera, who runs a charity that helps forced marriage victims and survived a forced marriage herself.

It is important to remember that all major religions (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Christian and Jewish) are against forced marriage.

Many of these forced marriages affect the woman or girl more than the man (boy) since the man in some religions and countries can have all the brides she wants, child brides are very common.

If there is no reduction in child marriage, the global number of child brides will reach 1.2 billion by 2050.

1 in 3 girls in the developing world are said to be married before 18.

Over 700 million women alive today were married as children.

20 COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST RATES OF WOMEN MARRIAGE:

1. Niger

2. Central African Republic
3. Chad
4. Mali
5. South Sudan
6. Burkina Faso
7. Guinea
8. Bangladesh
9. Mozambique
10. India
11. Malawi
12. Somalia
13. Nigeria
14. Madagascar
15. Eritrea
16. Ethiopia
17. Nicaragua
18. Uganda
19. Sierra Leone
20. Cameroon

Woman marriage prevalence is the percentage of women 20-24 years old who were first married or in union before they were 18 years old. It is based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other national surveys, and refers to the most recent year available during the period 2008-2014.

Topic B: Women Empowerment: Gender Inequalities

Women and girls represent half of the world's population and therefore also half of its potential. But, today gender inequality persists everywhere and stagnates social progress. As of 2014, 143 countries have guaranteed equality between men and women in their Constitutions but 52 have yet to take this step. About one third of developing countries have not achieved gender parity in primary education. In sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Western Asia, girls still face barriers to entering both primary and secondary school. About one third of developing countries have not achieved gender parity in primary education. In sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Western Asia, girls still face barriers to entering both primary and secondary school. Inequalities faced by girls can begin right at birth and follow them all their lives. In some countries, girls are deprived of access to health care or proper nutrition, leading to a higher mortality rate. As girls move into adolescence, gender disparities widen. Child marriage affects girls far more than boys. Globally, nearly 15 million girls under age 18 are married every year— or 37,000 each day.

Disadvantages in education translate into lack of access to skills and limited opportunities in the labour market. Women's and girls' empowerment is essential to expand economic growth and promote social development. The full participation of women in labor forces would add percentage points to most national growth rates— double digits in many cases.

Regardless of where you live in, gender equality is a fundamental human right. Advancing gender equality is critical to all areas of a healthy society, from reducing poverty to promoting the health, education, protection and the well-being of girls and boys.

Women's empowerment principles

The UN is committed to implement the 7 Principles to unleash the full potential of women and girls and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set for 2030.

- 1) Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- 2) Treat all women and men fairly at work, respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
- 3) Ensure the health, safety and well being of all women and men workers.
- 4) Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- 5) Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- 6) Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- 7) Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

The goal is to ensure that women have a real voice in all governance institutions, from the judiciary to the civil service, as well as in the private sector and civil society, so they can participate equally with men in public dialogue and decision-making and influence the decisions that will determine the future of their families and countries.



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