

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

<p>Adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, CEDAW 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.</p> <p>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."</p> <p>By accepting the Convention, countries commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises. <p>Countries can take measures such as legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms.</p> <p>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. "Constructive dialogues" with representatives from the respective governments and other relevant invited bodies review the reports.</p> <p>As of 26 March 2004, 177 countries - over ninety percent of the members of the United Nations - are party to the Convention and an additional one has signed the treaty, binding itself to do nothing in contravention of its terms.</p> <p>The Optional Protocol was adopted by the General Assembly in Oct. 1999. The Protocol enables individuals and groups to submit a formal complaint to the UN when their countries violate CEDAW. This enables the UN to demand information and explanations from the country in question.</p>
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Canada and CEDAW

Canada signed the CEDAW in 1980 and ratified in **1981**. Canada signed the Optional Protocol in October 2002.

In 1990, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women submitted a parallel report to the United Nations regarding Canada's second CEDAW report which focused on the negative impact that Canada's **changing economic priorities**, including cuts to core funding for women's

organizations, access to employment insurance, quality child care, abortion, and employment equity, were having on women in Canada.

In 1993, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women **produced a report on the steps Canada had taken to fulfill its obligations under CEDAW in which it concluded** that few of Canada's CEDAW commitments had been fully, or even partially fulfilled, **and that Canada continued to enter into international treaty agreements without being clear about how or if they would be implemented.**

In 1997, an ad hoc group of individuals and organizations produced a shadow report on the occasion of the 4th UN review of Canada's adherence to CEDAW. This report focused on the **growth of women's inequality as a direct result of the government of Canada's policy priorities.** The report illuminated the negative impact of the **federal government's elimination of the Canada Assistance Plan in 1995** (which had set standards in the delivery of health care, education and social security programs across the country).

The report concluded that these policies compromise Canada's own domestic commitments to women's inequality, including those made in the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedom* (which the federal government has identified as one of the primary vehicles through which CEDAW is upheld in Canada).

In 2002, the *Feminist Alliance for International Action* (FAFIA) submitted an alternative report to the United Nations CEDAW Committee on the occasion of the 5th review of Canada's report. The report, *Canada's Failure to Act: Women's Inequality Deepens* demonstrates that many laws, policies and programs necessary to ensure women's inequality have not been implemented or, alternately, have been eliminated.

In January 2003, the UN Committee which reviewed Canada's compliance to CEDAW noted that the federal government must take urgent action to remedy the profoundly unequal status of Aboriginal and First Nations women, the systemic discrimination confronted by immigrant and refugee women as well as women who come to Canada under the Live-in caregiver program, the scarce resources for legal aid for family and civil law, women's increasing poverty, and the downloading of care-giving onto women due to cuts in social programs.

For further information:

Status of Women Canada http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/about/about_e.html

Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA): http://www.fafia-afai.org/index_e.htm is an alliance of over 40 Canadian women's equality-seeking non-governmental organizations formed in February 1999 at a national consultation of women's organizations held in Ottawa. **Thanks to FAFIA for the use of their information on CEDAW.**

San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women (and their implementation of CEDAW)
http://www.ci.sf.ca.us/site/cosw_index.asp?id=10848

United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

Toronto Women's Call to Action: towomensmanifesto@yahoo.ca