

15. Reflections on CEDAW

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The adoption of CEDAW in 1979 was the culmination of activism on the part of women from all over the world. Women fighting for equality before the law, women struggling for justice for rural women, women workers fighting for benefits, women challenging inequality in the family, united to bring forth this Convention that would create an international normative framework for the protection of the rights of women.

CEDAW has also adapted to new developments and important trends as they have evolved over the years. At the time CEDAW was drafted, violence against women was still a taboo subject for nation states. By the 1990s, the discourse had changed, and the CEDAW Committee acted swiftly to adopt a General Recommendation. This has since become the basis for reporting on violence against women.

The CEDAW Committee is strong and active, with powerful members who question member states with the diligence of true independent experts. They draft comprehensive and useful conclusions and recommendations that form the basis for much of the follow-up within the nation state concerned.

CEDAW has also spawned activist NGOs and scholars who watch the formal, governmental process with close attention and who submit shadow reports to the Committee so as to ensure that it has access to all the important information. This enables the Committee to do its work objectively and impartially.

An anniversary is a time for celebration, but also a time to reflect on what needs to be done. CEDAW puts forward the ideal of equal and empowered women with all the rights and freedoms available to men. For many throughout the world this is still only an ideal, perhaps a far away dream. But the Convention and its activist Committee is seeking to make this dream a reality by engaging constructively with national governments, questioning their political will and by making recommendations for future action. By creating a universal standard it strives to help women everywhere lead true and meaningful lives.

Nonetheless, the challenges are also manifold. How do we struggle against relativist tendencies that have begun to challenge this universal standard? How do we implement

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the practical and concrete programmes that will bring true changes in the lives of women? How do we approach some of the social, economic, political and ideological structures of power that still resist transformation in the lives of women? These are hard questions, which are for the CEDAW Committee and also beyond the CEDAW Committee. Yet, the action that CEDAW has given us and the hard work of so many women in different parts of the world will bear fruit if we continue to work toward the universal standards set out in the Convention.