

Statement of

# **The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
Vermont  
November 18, 2010

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,  
Hearing On "Women's Rights Are Human Rights: U.S. Ratification Of The Convention On The  
Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)"  
November 18, 2010

I would like to thank Senator Durbin for holding this important hearing on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). I was proud to work with Senator Durbin to create the Human Rights and the Law Subcommittee, the first congressional committee established to specifically address human rights issues. The work we have done through this subcommittee has helped the Senate focus on ending human rights abuses such as genocide, human trafficking and crimes against humanity. By passing laws that hold the perpetrators of these horrific acts accountable, we continue to advance America's role as a world leader in protecting and promoting equality and human rights.

I am sorry to say that we cannot say the same about America's leadership on the issue we address today. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination of Women is a landmark international agreement that affirms principles of fundamental human rights and equality for women and girls. It was adopted by the United Nations in 1979 and it has been ratified by 186 out of 193 countries in the world. The United States stands alongside Sudan, Somalia, Iran, Palau, Nauru, and Tonga as the only countries failing to ratify this important human rights convention.

Our failure to ratify CEDAW stands in stark contrast to the American values of fairness and equality. Women and girls in the United States are treated with dignity and equality not available to most of the world's women. Here in the Senate, I have worked to further women's rights as a champion of the Violence Against Women Act, which marked an important and ongoing national commitment to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. To combat wage discrimination, I cosponsored the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, which restored the ability of victims to file suit against discriminatory employers and fight wage discrimination on the basis of gender.

I have also championed the human rights of women around the world through efforts to prosecute the use of rape as a war crime, to prosecute human traffickers who prey on women and girls, and to aid the victims of these heinous crimes.

While we should be proud of all we have accomplished at home, we cannot forget that there is more to be done. Women and girls around the world suffer discrimination and abuse daily. They are denied access to education, health care and employment. They are sold into sexual and domestic slavery. They are abused, beaten and killed because of their gender.

This Convention has proven to be a critical tool to end these practices. It has been used to increase access to primary education for girls, improve protection from sex trafficking and violence, expand health services, and promote economic independence. It has provided opportunities for women to partner with their governments and shape policies to promote equality and protect human rights.

Ratification of CEDAW by the United States would further strengthen the Convention's effectiveness internationally. It would send a strong message to other governments that women's rights are human rights and they must be respected. It would also reaffirm that the United States is indeed a global leader in standing up for women and girls and it would continue our proud bipartisan tradition of protecting human rights. Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton achieved ratification of similar agreements on torture, genocide, and race discrimination. There is no reason we can't do the same for gender discrimination.

I commend Senator Durbin for holding this hearing and the Obama administration for calling for ratification of the Convention. The time to act is now and I urge my fellow senators to support ratification of this life saving convention. I look forward to hearing testimony from today's witnesses.

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