

**Global Policy Project 2000-2001
Ratifying CEDAW:
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination Against Women**

Final Project Report

Submitted by
UNA-USA Oakland County, MI chapter
co-sponsored by
The Dondero High School Model United Nations program

**Working Conference Held on December 9, 2000
at Dondero High School, Royal Oak, Michigan**

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Dissemination: *Senator Carl Levin, Senator Deborah Stabenow, The United Nations Association of the United States of America (national, Michigan division, and Michigan chapters), all conference participants, local media, interested others contacting Oakland County UNA-USA*

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Introduction

Initiated, organized, and coordinated by The Dondero Model UN program, the Oakland County Global Policy Project 2000-2001 invited broader community participation, including UNA-USA members, local legislators, educators, and interested citizens. This report is the final result of their work, summarizing key recommendations and arguments for the United States immediate ratification on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Project Overview

Stage One: Annual **Southeast Michigan Model United Nations Association conference** in October 2000 at Dearborn High School. Student delegates debated ratification and enforcement issues surrounding women's rights and CEDAW. [A copy of the background paper for this debate is included.]

Stage Two: Conducted as a **working citizens conference**, a one-day forum, on December 9, 2000, held at Dondero High School in Royal Oak, Michigan. The results of this forum make up the bulk of this report.

Stage Three: Dissemination of final report. Designed to give legislators initial arguments for the debate on ratification, the report will be sent to Michigan senators and interested others in early 2001.

A more complete description of the project may be found on page

Substantive Recommendations

The following recommendations should be viewed as the consensus recommendations of the working committees through the conference day. Conference participants were encouraged to write any minority opinions they wished to be included in this report. Significantly, none were filed, nor were any minority or opposing views offered. The recommendations offered here are the beliefs of the entire project.

Mission Statement:

Our mission is ratifying CEDAW—a document giving a foundation for fair laws, based upon the strengths and convictions of equal rights for all women, to benefit society.

CEDAW accords with the perceived--but not realized--notion of equality which already exists in the minds of the American people. CEDAW documents these beliefs, giving a basis for fair laws, founded upon the strengths and convictions of equal rights for all.

Ratify CEDAW to provide moral and political leadership, for the full partnership of women is building stronger families and a better world. As leaders in the fight for democracy and human rights around the world, we can do no less.

Rationale for U.S. Ratification of CEDAW

- ❖ **Maintains or increases U.S. credibility in global moral leadership**
 - Provides “more teeth” to U.S. exportation of democratic values, including women’s rights
 - Promotes the concept of inclusiveness
 - Allows the U.S. to credibly participate in debate on achievement of goals and enforcement of human rights
 - Reaffirms the U.S. commitment, acknowledges its advances, and pledges the U.S. to go further
 - Marks the U.S. as not satisfied with the status quo, but committed to advancement, to action
 - Marks the U.S. as *fair to humans*
- ❖ **Fosters domestic economic growth and growth of nations abroad**
 - *“Passage of CEDAW would stimulate a nation’s economic growth by helping to remove gender barriers that discriminate against women.”*
 - Increases skills, intellectual power
 - Increases purchasing power
 - Increases contribution of labor pool

- ❖ **Redefines economic development and measurement**
 - Women's work can be valued as part of a nation's GDP
 - Consequently, promotes reform of international finance and aid: If a nation's GDP is too low for IMF terms, for instance, the nation is forced to give up economic control and new parameters for financing are established. If work is added into GDP calculation. . . .
 - “*‘Empower’ means giving back capably.*” (In the U.S., this has meant renewed efforts to include women in math and science fields.)

- ❖ **Reinforces existing domestic laws**
 - The U.S. has already made laws to ensure financial freedoms (i.e. bank loans), just as Article 13 guarantees

- ❖ **Builds foundation for future law**
 - Non-binding agreement; nothing restrictive by ratifying
 - Places the U.S. in a larger unified framework to justify advancements in domestic law

- ❖ **Rebalances negative impact of non-ratification with positive results**
 - Reduces or eliminates perception of U.S. hypocrisy on this issue
 - Can resolve domestic policies which are inherently unbalanced (i.e. armed services policies for women's health needs)

- ❖ **Increases domestic awareness and concern**
 - Increases support for women's movement
 - Improves awareness of women's rights abroad

- ❖ **Reservations may be made to objectionable articles**
 - Reservations may be amended or removed after ratification.

Objections to CEDAW and Responses

❖ **The Family Planning Objection:**

- Part II, Section 2, Article 11: Guarantees for employment protection: Implies health care protections and funds, especially in reproductive health and child care.
- Part II, Article 10: “Wealth and well-being of family.”
- Other articles within the framework guarantee women’s access to education and health care including power in planning for families

Responses:

- *“The most important factor in reducing the birthrate worldwide is to empower women.”*
- *“The alternative to guaranteeing women access to education and health care is to endorse the denial of it.”*
- Family planning and abortion are not synonyms. Access to education and health care is a broad and inclusive guarantee; the cost of denial of all health needs to eliminate one is grossly imbalanced.
- Many countries (including the U.S.) guarantee health rights (even for reproductive health) to men, but not to women.
- Reservations to objectionable articles may be made

❖ **The Enforcement Objection:**

- Ratification would somehow force the U.S. to adopt inappropriate legislation.

Responses:

- CEDAW is a non-binding agreement; there is nothing restrictive by ratifying
 - It compels the U.S. to admit to any existing problems and accept a process to solve them
 - CEDAW holds the U.S. “equally accountable” as other nations
 - Like all human rights documents, it establishes a process, an overall movement, for compliance
 - Interpretation and weight of CEDAW is open to the signers/ratifiers
 - Process is slow and multi-faceted
 - The U.S. would document its own compliance
 - *“Passage of CEDAW is an initial step in an on-going process toward ensuring human rights for all.”*
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Background Materials Used

Fourth World Conference on Women. "FWCW Platform for Action: Human Rights of Women." www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/index.html.

"Terms of International Law." *Action Alert* Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs, 122 C Street, NW, Suite 125, Washington, DC 20001-2172.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. U.N.T.S. No. 20378, vol. 1249 (1981), p. 13.

Post-Conference Matters

Local Expertise: Southeast Michigan is fortunate to have a number of women who have committed themselves to the advancement of women's rights around the world. From local activists to participants at the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, we can put you in contact with speakers and experts on this topic. Contact us.

Distribution: Copies of this report will be submitted specifically to Senators Carl Levin and Deborah Stabenow, all conference participants, all Michigan UNA-USA chapters, local media, and will be made available to interested citizens.

Supplemental Material: Copies of this report should be distributed with an appropriate cover letter of explanation and a copy of the pre-conference materials.

Available Media Material: Video tapes and photographs of the event are available. Video can be edited to suit any special requirements.

Project Structure

Format of Global Policy Project

There were two stages to the Global Policy Project locally.

The first was at an annual **Southeast Michigan Model United Nations Association conference** in October 2000 at Dearborn High School where nearly 200 students gathered. In one committee, 30 student delegates participated in a simulation of the Commission on the Status of Women, debating ratification and enforcement issues surrounding women's rights and CEDAW. [A copy of the background paper for this debate is included.]

Conclusions of Stage One: While resolutions in the debate centered around problems in the enforcement of any human rights document, CEDAW included, it was clear that moral and political leadership were critical undercurrents to the debate. Particular attention was paid to the United States by other countries for its apparently contradictory positions: how could it pretend to support women's rights abroad when it could or would not support a document of fundamental goals in its own country? Some of the participants of that debate attended the second stage of the project as well. And, as became clear in the citizens conference, that leadership issue became key to the discussion; participants soon found themselves focusing on arguments to ratify immediately.

The second stage of the project was conducted as a **working citizens conference**, a one-day forum, on December 9, 2000, held at Dondero High School in Royal Oak, Michigan. The results of this forum make up the bulk of this report.

An **opening plenary session** at 10:00 included opening statements on the goals and issues surrounding CEDAW, including the pressing need for the United States to assume its full leadership potential in this area.

A series of **working committee sessions** followed, moderated by adults experienced in loose parliamentary format, though the goal of each session was to achieve consensus on the questions before each committee through informal discussion in three separate sessions through the day. Participants were permitted to shift between committees in each session.

A final **plenary session** re-assembled the working committees for reports on the topics discussed. Committee representatives presented to the body the results of their work and minority speakers were asked to present their arguments and concerns following each report. Closing session included affirmations by participants.

While the conference operated only two working committees at a time, their topics included domestic issues, economic and political rights, educational access, and international credibility.

Demographics

Size of Study Group:

Preparation Study: Several members of the Dondero High School Model UN team met through the fall of 2000 to prepare conference materials and study the issues, narrowing the debate to issues that might be handled during a one-day long forum.

The Conference Participants: The conference day, which lasted from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, ranged in size from a **minimum** of 26 participants to a **maximum** of 36 participants across the sessions, **averaging** just over 30 during each session. In **total**, the conference included the ideas of 36 participants.

Composition of the Study Group:

Age:	Age 14 -- 30	61%
	Age 31 – 50	11%
	Age 51- 65	17%
	Age 65+	11%

Sex:	Male	44%
	Female	56%

Ethnicity:	Caucasian	83%
	Asian	11%
	African-American	0%
	Other	6%

Occupation:	Student	61%
	Professional	11%
	All others/Retired	28%

Declared Political Party:		
	None:	17%
	Democrat	67%
	Republican	11%

Political Philosophy:		
	Liberal	50%
	Moderate Liberal	5%
	Moderate	22%
	Moderate Conservative	11%
	Conservative	5%

Knowledge of International Affairs:

Excellent	17%
Fair	67%
Limited	11%
None	0%

Personal “stake” in international women’s rights:

High	28%
Fair	61%
Limited	0%
None	5%

Necessity for US involvement in international affairs:

High	67%
Fair	28%
Limited	0%
None	0%

Organizations Represented:

- Olivet College
- Model United Nations programs
- League of Women Voters
- National Organization for Women
- United Nations Association of the United States of America