



November 15, 2010

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Coburn, and Members of the Subcommittee  
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law  
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Coburn, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) is the only national, multi-issue Asian and Pacific Islander (API) women's organization in the country. NAPAWF's mission is to build a movement to advance social justice and human rights for API women and girls. Since its founding, NAPAWF has supported the ratification of Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). NAPAWF believes that U.S. ratification of the Women's Treaty would advance the civil rights, economic opportunity, educational access, health, immigrant and refugee rights, and efforts to end violence against women. These issues are all core to NAPAWF's mission and important to women all over the world.

Women's rights are human rights. CEDAW affirms fundamental principles of human rights and equality for women and girls. It sets forth practical goals and steps for each country to make further progress for women and girls. 186 countries have ratified CEDAW; yet the U.S. is one of only seven UN member countries that have not ratified CEDAW amongst Iran, Somalia, Sudan and three small Pacific Island nations. By ratifying CEDAW, the U.S. will be strengthened as a global leader in furthering the rights of women.

Ratification of CEDAW is important to the United States for many reasons; four main reasons are highlighted below:

**1. Ratifying CEDAW will be beneficial to the U.S.** Countries ratifying CEDAW commit to preparing comprehensive reports on the status of women and girls in the country. Undertaking this broad analysis is an important vehicle for identifying areas of improvement and increasing awareness of conditions that may have a unique impact on women. For example, in 1998, San Francisco adopted a Municipal Ordinance based on CEDAW. Pursuant to that Ordinance, program and policy reviews were undertaken by

National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) ★ 1322 18<sup>th</sup> Street, NW ★ Washington, DC 20036

Tel: 202-470-3170 ★ Fax: 202-470-3171 ★ info@napawf.org ★ www.napawf.org



local agencies and departments. After its review, the Department of Public Works improved city lighting because it recognized that good streetlights were important to prevent violence against women, who are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault, and the lighting provided an important benefit for all.

**2. CEDAW would provide an additional tool for addressing the problems that girls and women still face in the U.S.** While women in the U.S. enjoy opportunities and status that are not available to many women in other parts of the world, few would dispute that more progress is warranted. For example:

- Domestic violence: The federal Violence Against Women Act (“VAWA”), originally passed in 1994, has enhanced the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of violence against women, and provided multi-faceted services for victims of family violence and sexual assaults. In addition, all of the fifty states and the District of Columbia have their own laws outlawing violence against women, including domestic abuse, and provide a range of protections and services to battered women. However, domestic violence remains a serious problem in the U.S., with an average of four women per day murdered and 5.5 million women per year physically assaulted or raped by intimate partners. In the API community, forty one to sixty percent of Asian women report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime in community-based studies compiled by the API Institute on Domestic Violence. CEDAW’s commitment to ending violence against women would reinforce our efforts.
- Trafficking: The U.S. has taken a strong stand against trafficking with the enactment of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which provides stiff penalties for traffickers, assists and protects victims, and commits funding to anti-trafficking efforts in the U.S. and abroad... Nevertheless, some estimates suggest that there may be 20,000 women, men, and children trafficked into the U.S. each year, who are forced to labor under slavery-like conditions. It is estimated that 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked into the U.S. each year. Trafficking survivors in the U.S. are mostly from Asia, Central and South America and Eastern Europe. CEDAW ratification would serve to strengthen the existing U.S. commitment to preventing the trafficking of women and children, and providing



services and access to justice to trafficking victims attempting to rebuild their lives.

- Pay Discrimination: Women are now half of the workforce in the U.S., but women working full-time today earn, on average, only 77 cents for every dollar paid to men. This is especially harmful given that women are the primary breadwinners in nearly 4 in 10 families. Eliminating the wage gap is of critical importance to API women, whether they are single mothers, supporting older relatives, or just trying to put themselves through college. CEDAW recognizes that ending discrimination against women in the workplace includes fair pay for their work. Ratification of CEDAW would encourage efforts to close this gap.
- School dropouts: Girls are not denied access to education in the U.S. However, one in four high school girls in this country drops out before graduation, and those girls have an average annual income that is \$9,100 below even the low wages earned by boys who drop out. CEDAW specifically calls for reducing girls' dropout rates and for helping those who have left school, and its ratification would encourage the development of programs to address the dropout problem.
- Discrimination in Education. CEDAW asks countries to provide equal rights for women in all aspects of education. In career and technical (previously known as vocational) education, girls in this country are still conspicuously absent from classes that prepare students for higher-paying, traditionally male occupations, such as electricians and automotive technicians. In higher education, women are only a small percentage of those studying and teaching physical and computer sciences and engineering. CEDAW would provide a stimulus for greater focus on these disparities and increased enforcement of antidiscrimination laws, and for efforts among educators and government officials to eliminate barriers and encourage girls and women to develop their interests in non-traditional areas

**3. Ratifying CEDAW will make the U.S. a more effective leader in helping women around the world.** While much progress has been made globally, more work remains to be done around the world with regard to women's health, education, employment, and the other areas addressed by CEDAW:

**National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) ★ 1322 18<sup>th</sup> Street, NW ★ Washington, DC 20036**

**Tel: 202-470-3170 ★ Fax: 202-470-3171 ★ info@napawf.org ★ www.napawf.org**



- In many countries, women confront high rates of maternal and child mortality, which could be reduced by increasing the availability of prenatal care and skilled birth attendants.
- Women are more than half of those living with HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East. Strategies are needed to reduce women's vulnerability to this disease and treatment is needed for those who are infected.
- Female genital mutilation is still common in a number of countries and must be ended.
- Women and girls need greater access to education. Two-thirds of the world's 774 million illiterate adults are women, a proportion that has not changed over the past 20 years.
- More women than men live in poverty. In addition to the discrimination women face in employment, poverty can be caused by legal and customary restrictions on women's ability to own land and other types of property. These laws and customs should be changed.

In this age of globalization, the fate of our nation is more closely intertwined with that of the rest of the world than ever before. The United States can enhance our longstanding role as a global leader for women's rights and human rights if we engage with the community of nations that has ratified CEDAW in determining how best to achieve progress for women and girls.

**4. CEDAW has helped women in other countries.** By providing a practical blueprint for women's progress, CEDAW has led to real gains for women in many countries, including by:

- Reducing violence against women and trafficking;
- Enhancing economic opportunity, by reducing discrimination in the workplace and forwarding property and inheritance rights;
- Increasing women's political participation; and
- Forwarding women's human rights.



Ratification of CEDAW fulfills both domestic goals to advance women's rights while simultaneously serving to cement the U.S.'s commitment to the global movement for women's rights. Further, ratification advances the goals and reflects the values of the six policy platforms on which NAPAWF was founded to advance social justice and human rights for API women and girls.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement of support for the ratification of the Convention to End Discrimination Against Women UN treaty.

Thank you,  
Miriam W. Yeung, MPA  
Executive Director  
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum