

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 60 and the CEDAW Committee
Adopted on 4 November 2008 at the 42nd session

When in 1945 the Peoples of the United Nations stressed "their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person (and) in the equal rights of men and women", a new era started in the history of humankind. At the time the gap between these words and the reality on the ground was enormous, but a first significant step was set on the road towards full equality of women and men which would prove to be irreversible.

On 10 December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly then composed of 56 States adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that further elaborated and substantiated the United Nations Charter general references to human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Declaration is based on the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace around the world; the message of the Declaration was and is that human rights are universal and inclusive. Thirty years later, however, the General Assembly expressed its concern that despite the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two United Nations Covenants of 1966 which also contain an obligation for all States Parties to ensure the equal right of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights, extensive discrimination against women around the world continued to exist. The General Assembly, therefore, decided in 1979 to adopt the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In 2008 this Convention has been ratified by 185 States parties. The CEDAW Committee is entrusted with the supervision of the implementation of the Convention by the States Parties. There is no doubt that also in 2008 full equality, both formal and substantive, of women and men around the world has not yet been achieved. Nevertheless, the CEDAW Committee is convinced that the principle of equality of women and men in the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms does not only constitute a crucial treaty obligation, but is also emerging as a principle of customary international law. All states can be held accountable for complying with this principle which can be seen as the cornerstone of all human rights. This important achievement would not have been possible without the vision of those who, representing different cultures and religions, drafted and adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the CEDAW Convention.

The CEDAW Committee is determined to continue its work under the Convention and its Optional Protocol and monitor the practical realization of the principle of equality of women and men in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the years ahead. In this context the CEDAW Committee invites those States that are not yet party to the Convention or its Optional Protocol to speedily consider ratification or accession. The CEDAW Committee further calls on all other human rights treaty bodies, the Human Rights Council and all UN organs, entities and agencies to continue to strengthen their contribution to the full realization of the principle of equality of women and men in the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
