



Elimination of Discrimination

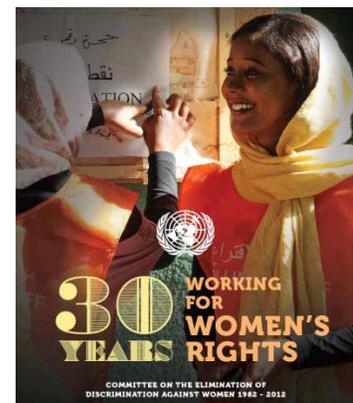
Much of the work at the UN is aspirational in nature, consisting of declarations and resolutions intended to persuade political leaders to work together to create a safer and fairer world. As motivational documents, encouraging leaders to align national interests with international goals for the good of all, they serve their purpose, however a treaty such as **CEDAW** (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) with enforceable obligations and periodic public review mechanisms has much sharper teeth than a declaration.

Created 30 years ago in 1982 *to emphasize the specificity of discrimination against women, and the need to give high prominence to the promotion and protection of women's human rights*¹, the convention has almost universal acceptance, having been signed by 187 of the 193 UN Member States (countries).

Over the past two weeks I have witnessed CEDAW in action, as selected countries have presented their reports. CEDAW experts and NGOs had numerous opportunities to comment on the reports, ask questions, table additional evidence and engage the country representatives in constructive dialogue. At the end of the process, CEDAW will publish its findings on how well a particular country is complying with the convention, gaps will be noted and a timeframe set for the implementation of appropriate action.

In this reporting period, CEDAW is paying particular attention to the following aspects of discrimination: women in conflict and post-conflict situations; harmful practices; access to justice; asylum, statelessness and natural disasters; inequities experienced by rural women; and human trafficking.

Article 6 of the CEDAW treaty states: *States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.*



Women at a polling station, Sudan

In recent months, I have been instrumental, together with a number of like-minded colleagues, in establishing an NGO committee to co-ordinate efforts to **combat trafficking in human persons**, focusing

¹ CEDAW, *30 Years Working for Women's Rights*, 2, 4

on ways this can be done using UN protocols and treaties as tools. For instance, we have worked on a number of initiatives to draw attention to the increased risk of exploitation of women and children posed by high profile events, such as the London Olympics. I am sure that many of you have been doing the same at national and local level.

Growing support for the concept of **ethical business practices** is another example of collaboration around issues of discrimination. Christian Brothers Investment Services (known to our communities in the USA) successfully lobbied for the enactment of a new law in California that requires manufacturers and retailers to disclose, on their corporate websites, their efforts to eliminate child labour and human trafficking from their supply chains.

It seems that a safer and more just world can only be achieved one small step at a time, by ordinary people doing ordinary things well. Let us therefore draw inspiration from the efforts of those who continue to work doggedly, year after year, to eliminate all forms of discrimination, in particular discrimination against women and children.

Anne Kelly ibvm, July 2012