



INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES FEMMES

www.womenalliance.org



The International Alliance of Women (IAW) is an international NGO. It was conceived in 1902 in Washington DC and founded in Berlin in 1904 as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. The present name was adopted in 1946 with the subtitle Equal Rights-Equal Responsibilities. The IAW amplifies the voices of its 43 member organizations and its individual members.

The IAW has held general consultative status at the UN ECOSOC since 1947. It is accredited to many specialized UN agencies and has participatory status with the Council of Europe. It is represented at the Arab League, the African Union, and other international organizations.

The IAW promotes women's human rights, gender equality and empowerment of women. The IAW calls on its members to hold governments accountable for the realization of women's rights, especially: eliminating violence against women; promoting and protecting human rights, health, and peace; upholding democracy; and combatting climate change.

TO: Members of the United Nations Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls (WGDAWG):

June 2024

CONTEXT:

The IAW supports the WGDAWG initiative to revive discussions on human rights and human dignity for all.ⁱ As our name implies, the IAW is an alliance of women working in partnership with its organizational and individual members to secure the universal ratification and implementation, without reservation,ⁱⁱ of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW.)

The IAW is pleased to respond to your request that we share the strategy of a US-based movement to revive discussions about localizing CEDAW to its cities and counties. The strategy is integrated with the 2030 sustainable development goals, especially SDG #5 and SDG #17. The strategy raises awareness of the “many ways

discrimination against women and girls exists in different spheres—from work to public policy to healthcare...”ⁱⁱⁱ The strategy leverages CEDAW to raise awareness of the care economy and combat unpaid care work. The challenging task of implementing CEDAW in local communities, and proposed measures to overcome these challenges, will be addressed in this written intervention.

Currently eighty million residents live in communities across the United States that are covered by a CEDAW resolution or ordinance. Women and local leaders, including men and youth, actively engage in decision-making from coast to coast, successfully seeking changes to embedded, unreasonable, and misguided social norms regarding women’s and girl’s autonomy. Women’s personal choice and local grassroots activism continue to change the social normative landscape for the betterment of all.

2024 marks the 10th year of the Cities for CEDAW^{iv} campaign in the USA. The campaign to localize CEDAW was launched by the NGO CSW/NY to commemorate Beijing +20. A founding leader of the campaign, Dr. Soon-Young Yoon remains engaged in this vital work and currently serves as the Head of the IAW Delegation to the UN in New York. The campaign^v continues to this day to be led by a coalition of feminist and youth organizations, working hand in hand with local officials. The campaign positively impacts people in more than sixty-five cities, counties, and states. The campaign raises awareness of this United Nations human rights convention in local communities, notably because the USA has yet to ratify CEDAW.

Since no two cities or counties are identical, it is critical to pursue social and policy change with an awareness of the unique personalities and history of the community. For example, a supervisor in Fairfax County, Virginia recently voted against a CEDAW resolution because it was a United Nations strategy. The supervisor argued that the UN, having failed to intervene on behalf of the Uighurs, was not a legitimate human rights policy maker. In another example, CEDAW advocates in the District of Columbia localized their strategy under the name EDAW, in part, to smooth its progress through its city council, without triggering widespread attention at the federal level.

IAW is pleased to outline some common denominators of successful strategies for localizing CEDAW. All strategies are impactful, partly because we are mindful of our target audience. Strategies are written and spoken in common language, not scholarly text. Acronyms, other than CEDAW, are minimized. We believe that a successful campaign depends on the early engagement of many community members in discussions of how a CEDAW resolution/ordinance will work for them and strengthen their community.

STRATEGY:

Strategy #1: Educate potential human rights defenders

Educational and advocacy training for local CEDAW campaigns takes place annually at the NGO CSW/NY. Large international networks are among the most active leaders in the campaign. Virtual and in-person parallel events draw large gatherings routinely and the seed is planted for growth of the movement to localize CEDAW. Potential trainers self-identify and return home to lead local campaigns. Experienced advocates serve as mentors. Working with city and county leaders early and often is a key to the successful education of public officials.

Strategy #2: Identify and then open a window of opportunity

Once feminists learn about CEDAW, they are more likely to seek opportunities to raise awareness of CEDAW with their local government representatives. One such feminist attended a program by the League of Women Voters (NGO) and took the opportunity to ask a pointed question of the director of the county's diversity and inclusion policy. She asked: *Why doesn't the county diversity and inclusion policy address the status of women?*

The director seemed flustered by the question. The director was not able to cite any study or policy on women's status in the county. The director invited the feminist to follow up with further questions after the program. The advocacy window had opened. The feminist followed up with questions and focused the director on localizing CEDAW.

Strategy #3: Build a coalition

Momentum for and success of local CEDAW campaigns grows exponentially as the number of organizations engaged in the campaign increases. Elected leaders are more easily persuaded to take calls from constituents when that constituent faithfully represents that she is part of a grassroots feminist coalition. The Fairfax County Working Group for CEDAW (coalition) included the Fairfax County Commission For Women, the City of Fairfax Commission For Women and nearly 1,000 women from these participating NGOs: League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area; Zonta Club of Fairfax County; American Association of University Women of Virginia; United Nations Association of the National Capital Region; National Council of Negro Women, Inc-Reston/Dulles section; ReflectUS, ASHA for Women/Ashiyanaa; Fairfax NAACP; Human Rights Special Interest Group (HRSIG); Delta Kappa Gamma Society International for Key Women Educators-Beta Delta Chapter.

Strategy #4: Harness the power of key feminists to convene, influence and moderate

A primary task of the original community trainer is to identify feminist(s) who will convene the local NGO's advocates, influence the local elected officials, and moderate planning sessions during the campaign.

Strategy #5: Distribute existing resources, modified for your local community

Much has been written already about importing CEDAW principles to city and county governments in the USA. *Cities for CEDAW* developed a toolkit to “educate, equip, encourage and empower you to advocate for women’s rights and CEDAW in your local community.”^{vi}

Examples of local CEDAW resolutions and ordinances are compiled on the *Cities for CEDAW* website. This resource is useful in drafting localized advocacy materials. Localized materials may include briefing books for city council members and county supervisors that include examples of resolutions from other similarly situated jurisdictions, Talking Points explaining why the USA has not ratified CEDAW, streamlined chart on CEDAW General Recommendations, State-government Resolutions commemorating CEDAW, and a Frequently Asked Questions worksheet.

There is much to be said about building feminists’ competence and confidence on CEDAW before they address their elected officials with proposed resolutions and ordinances. It is recommended that feminists familiarize themselves with the local campaign’s materials and then practice “elevator speeches” and hold mock debates to argue conflicting positions on CEDAW. The Human Rights Special Interest Group developed a guide, called *COUNTERMOVES*, that lists many opposition statements to CEDAW (by elected officials) and proposes affirming responses by CEDAW advocates.^{vii}

Strategy #6: Draw attention to the campaign using creative tools

Creative tools, such as video presentations, first-person stories, and specialized banners motivate community members to engage in advocacy work. One such video showcased “actors” portraying the actual testimony of local officials during public hearings.^{viii}

Strategy #7: Plan for implementation of the CEDAW resolution/ordinance

Forward thinking prepares feminists to anticipate and address the biggest challenges in localizing CEDAW campaigns. The consensus recommends advocates focus on drafting a resolution or ordinance that includes provisions for: funding for a baseline community gender study; the implementation of the eventual resolution/ordinance;

the appointment or election of a substantial number of women to positions in policy decision-making; and a gender analysis of city agencies and commissions that sets deadlines for accountability.

ASK:

Scaling up localization of CEDAW requires commitment from international bodies. The WGDAWG is a key international force in the promotion and protection of human rights for women and girls. Therefore, we ASK the WGDAWG to support:

- Making CEDAW a standing agenda item in regional preparatory meetings as well as at CSW
- Upgrading the CSW to a Council, following the precedent of the Human Rights Council
- Participation of feminist NGOs in the negotiations to the Agreed Conclusions at the CSW
- Integration of CEDAW with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, UN Habitat, and the World Urban Campaign during the regional preparatory meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women, High Level Political Forum, and World Urban Summits ^{ix}
- Engagement of feminist international NGOs in the localization of CEDAW during the preparation of Local Voluntary Reports for presentation at the High Level Political Forum

Cordially submitted,

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ⁱ Introductory remarks by Chair Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, April 30, 2024, NGO Consultation at UN Headquarters

ⁱⁱ www.womenalliance.org/about-iaw/action-programme/

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://unworkinggroupwomenandgirls.org/>

^{iv} <https://citiesforcedaw.org>

^v The history of the campaign to ratify CEDAW in the USA can be found at <https://citiesforcedaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CEDAW-toolkit-July-2017.pdf>

^{vi} <https://citiesforcedaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CEDAW-toolkit-July-2017.pdf>

^{vii} https://www.hrsig.org/_files/ugd/1b370f_369d1f05995e4564a6f5b1a14515ff6a.pdf

^{viii} <https://youtu.be/WLLY4wdzBV0?si=17N-URjF2C7mdKbk> This video and its companion videos were presented at the CSW67 Forum. You may access play 1 and play 2 of THE CEDAW TRILOGY at: The Grand Dames of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights <https://youtu.be/0gJXIRSxHa8> The Struggle for CEDAW <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ezc9iEqwZy8>

^{ix} <https://unhabitat.org/topic/gender> and <https://www.worldurbancampaign.org>