

## **Shulamith Koenig**

### Women as full human beings.

In a long and exciting journey undertaken to have all people around the world know and own human rights as a way of life, allow me to share a celebration which guides us on the road to understand the holistic vision and practical mission of human rights, for which we have no other option.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December women and men around the world are celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CEDAW, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Within the existing patriarchal order CEDAW is an extraordinary revolutionary document, unique in its perception of women as full human beings.

My friend and mentor, professor Upendra Baxi writes:

“No single phrase in recent human history has been more privileged to bear the mission and burden of human destiny than [the phrase] “human rights”... -- the greatest gift of classical and contemporary human thought is the notion of human rights. Indeed, more than any other moral language available to us at this time in history, the language of human rights is able to expose the immorality and barbarism of the modern face of power”. From “Inhuman Wrongs and Human Rights”

Thirty years ago, this single powerful phrase ‘Human Rights’, was finally recognized as including and belonging to women too. CEDAW calls for equality and the elimination of discrimination, it also calls for the transformation of systems of oppression such as patriarchy and racism. Women’s human rights are about human rights for all, they speak to a life of shared

and respected humanity. The elimination of discrimination against women is an imperative if we strive in earnest towards human flourishing through human rights.

CEDAW was a major radical step forward, an act of transcendence, embarked on in a world dominated by a Patriarchal order (in which women willingly and unwillingly participate as well ...differences becoming a liability rather than joy.) CEDAW is recognizing and articulating the political, civil, economic, social and cultural human rights of women. It is a practical yet ground-breaking call that stands to make all religions, all cultures and economic and social organizations across the globe richer by accepting women as equal human beings. CEDAW gives women an important role as agents of change in the center of the State, communities and families.

It is important to stress again that CEDAW’s places an absolute prohibition on all forms of discrimination against women. Discrimination is defined as “any distinction, exclusion, or restriction, made on the basis of sex, with the purpose or effect” of obstructing the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls. Furthermore, in addition to demanding that women be accorded equal rights with men, the Convention prescribes the measures to be taken to ensure that women everywhere are able to enjoy their full human rights as full human beings to which they are fully entitled. The Convention covers all areas of life and frames them from a human rights perspective. Women’s right to political participation, education, health, equality in the family, a life free from violence and of an adequate standard of living are some of the human rights covered in the Convention. CEDAW talks about results, all actions taken by the government to improve the life of citizens should have led to equal results and benefits for women

and men. The understanding is that life with human rights for all is a win/win situation. Currently, **186** countries - over ninety percent of the members of the United Nations are party to CEDAW. These nations are bound to put the provisions of the Convention into practice and translate human rights into a lived experience for all. The act of ratification of this human rights convention by a specific country is what gives "teeth" to this call of equality and non discrimination for women. States that are party to CEDAW undertake the obligation to scrutinize their national laws accordingly and inform the population about it. Unfortunately too many States are slow in doing so. More upsetting and totally incomprehensible is the fact that the United States is not one of the 186 countries who are committed to upholding CEDAW. This fact speaks for itself and calls for change.

As part of the celebrations in commemoration of the adoption of the CEDAW, this article is a call for all readers to support and join actions to have the Convention ratified by the US Congress. After all, the Convention sets out internationally accepted principles that would be legally bounding in the United States after ratification. Just think about the ways CEDAW would enrich the current debates about healthcare reform. Imagine the possibility of sending children you love to learn about human rights in schools. Let's bring CEDAW home, let's make all human rights matter in this country. A first step is calling for ratification of CEDAW. Since learning about human rights is essential to the reader's personal empowerment, I have included some information about the Convention that may be of use to you.

Yes. Human Rights are a way of life. We have no other option

## **Background information on the Convention**

CEDAW was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1979 to reinforce the provisions of existing international instruments and thus making human rights indivisible, interconnected and interrelated designed to combating the continuing discrimination against women. CEDAW identifies many specific areas where there has been notorious discrimination against women, for example in regard to political human rights, marriage and the family, and employment. In these and other areas the Convention spells out specific goals and measures that are to be taken to facilitate the creation of a global society in which women enjoy full equality with men and thus full realization of their guaranteed humanity as full Human beings. When you read the summary below you will find several important areas of our lives that call for change in the USA as well.

CEDAW is the most important internationally recognized document to overcome the roots of discrimination enabling us to decipher between symptoms and causes. It gives the world a new, unique moral and legal framework to guide our daily, decisions and relationships. It enables women and men to understand and acknowledge the energies and creativity women have towards making this a better world for all as full human beings. We women must participate in the decision that determine our lives; guided by the holistic human rights framework.

Shulamith Koenig, Recipient of the 2003 UN Human Rights Award

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## USEFUL RESOURCES:

<http://pdhre.org/conventionsum/cedaw.html>

The text of the Convention:  
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm>

<http://actnow-phr.org/campaign/cedaw#petition>

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/violence-against-women/ratify-the-treaty-for-the-rights-of-women-cedaw/join-the-umbrella-petition/page.do?id=1108268>

Discrimination Against Women: The Convention and the Committee, Fact Sheet #22, UN Centre for Human Rights (<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet22en.pdf>)

Website in commemoration of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Convention:  
<http://www.unifem.org/cedaw30/>

Following is a draft recommendation as accepted by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Committee. This draft has become an official Resolution on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December at a special meeting of "Human Rights Day" of the General Assembly. ■ This Recommendation-Resolution has been presented and Championed by the Benin Republic Mission to the United Nations and acclaimed by all nations. . – Shulamith Koenig has initiated this resolution and its language. Same with earlier resolutions in 2007 and 2008.

GA Resolution  
Follow-up to the International Year of Human Rights Learning

*The General Assembly,*  
*Recalling that the purposes and*

principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations include promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, (63/173)

*Recalling* also its resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006, in which it decided that the Human Rights Council should, inter alia, promote human rights education and learning as well as advisory services, technical assistance and capacity-building, (63/173)

*Recalling also* the 2005 World Summit Outcome, in which Heads of State and Government expressed their support for the promotion of human rights education and learning at all levels, including through the implementation of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, as appropriate, and encouraged all States to develop initiatives in that regard, (63/173)

*Recalling further its* resolutions 62/171 of 18 Dec. 2007 and 63/173 of 18 December 2008 on the International Year of Human Rights Learning,

Welcoming the recently adopted Human Rights Council Resolution 12/4, establishing the focus on the second phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, and stressing the complementarity between Human Rights Learning and Human rights Education,

*Acknowledging* that civil society, academia, the private sector, the media and where appropriate, parliamentarians can play an important role at the national, regional and international levels in the development and facilitation of ways and means to promote and implement learning about human rights as a way of life at the community level, (63/173)

*Convinced* further that integrating Human Rights Learning into all relevant development policies and programs contributes to enable people to participate as equals in the decisions that determine their lives

Having consider the Report of the Secretary General contained in the document A/64/293

1. *Reaffirms* its conviction that every woman, man, youth and child can realize his or her full human potential through learning about the comprehensive framework of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the ability to act on that knowledge in order to ensure the effective realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all; (63/173)

2. Encourages Member States to expand on efforts undertaken during the International Year of Human Rights Learning and to consider devoting financial and human resources necessary to design and implement International, regional, national, and local long-term human rights learning programmes of action aimed at broad-based and sustained human rights learning at all levels in coordination with civil society, the media, the private sector, academia and parliamentarians and regional organizations, including the appropriate specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, *and where possible, in designating human rights cities.*

3. *Calls upon* the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council to support, cooperate and collaborate closely with civil society, the private sector, academia, regional organizations, the media and other relevant stakeholders, as well as with organizations, programmes and funds of the United Nations system, in efforts to develop, in particular, the design of international strategies and /or regional, national and local programs of action aimed at broad based and sustained Human Rights Learning at all levels. (63/173)

4. Recommends the Human Rights Council to integrate Human Rights Learning in the preparation of the draft UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training bearing in mind the complementarity of this initiative

with the World Programme for Human Rights Education and the Human Rights Learning;

5. *Encourages civil* society organizations worldwide ,in particular those working at the community level, to integrate Human Rights Learning .in dialogue and consciousness raising programs with groups working on, and other relevant political, civil economic, social and cultural issues,

6. Encourages relevant actors in the civil societies, including sociologists, anthropologists, academia, media and community leaders to develop the concept of human rights learning as ways and means to promote the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

7 Invites relevant Treaty Bodies to take into account Human Rights Learning when interacting with State Parties;

8. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-six session a report on the implementation of the present resolution.