POLICY BRIEF

The need for a new binding framework to end violence against women and girls

Every Woman Treaty at a glance

Every Woman Treaty is a global coalition of more than 3,000 women's rights activists and organizations in 147 countries advancing a global treaty to end violence against women and girls in the form of a new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Through advocacy and strategic diplomacy, we work to bring world leaders to the table to develop a treaty that will make the world safer for women and girls.

Our Fellowship Program, which is free and online, builds the captivity of advocates to call for a treaty and other policy changes on women's safety. Our Emerging Leaders Council engages youth in global systems change.

Background and rationale

Violence against women and girls is the most widespread human rights violation on earth. Globally, one in three women will experience intimate partner or sexual violence.¹ One in two women report that they or a woman they know have experienced violence since the Covid-19 pandemic.² Today, more than five women or girls are killed every hour by someone in their own family.³ Despite worldwide recognition of the problem, the problem is intensifying. With every new crisis — conflicts, climate change, pandemics — incidents of violence, including sexual violence, forced marriage, rape, femicides and intimate partner violence — increases.

A new binding framework is needed to curb the violence

The need for a specific, binding global instrument on violence against women reaches back to 1991 when the Commission on the Status of Women recommended the adoption of an international instrument specific to violence against women.\(^4\) UN Special Rapporteurs on violence against women have called on world leaders to adopt a new instrument. In 2013, women's rights activists heard this call and created Every Woman Treaty, a coalition working to advance a treaty on women’s safety.

An optional protocol would hold nations accountable for women's safety

The current legal frameworks on women's rights have made significant advances. However, gaps remain. Currently, no global instrument directly and exclusively addresses violence against women and girls. Despite the existence of regional mechanisms, including the Maputo Protocol, Belém do Pará, and Istanbul Convention, nearly 75 percent of the world's women lack access to a legally binding instrument on violence against women and girls. With the ongoing rise in violence, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive response to ensure protection, prevention, and accountability in addressing violence against women and girls internationally.

The power of a new mechanism

a. Effectiveness. Treaties, including Optional Protocols, codify norms. They therefore retain a legitimacy and universality that makes them work.

b. Transform. Treaties generate the momentum necessary to develop stronger frameworks for domestic plans of action. A metrics-based approach to monitoring can be a key driver in achieving strong outcomes.

Steps forward

The treaty can build on the work of the CEDAW Committee and General Recommendation No. 19 and 35. It can draw on strong support from civil society, including a decade of extensive research and consultations with experts across the world, made up of frontline activists, survivors, medical experts, academics, human rights attorneys, legal scholars, diplomats, and policymakers.

The treaty can provide a survivor-centric approach for: law reform; training for police, judges, nurses, and doctors; prevention education; survivor services like shelters and hotlines; and funding. Separately, these interventions influence various factors related to violence prevention, but when combined (and funded and monitored), the strategies work in concert to drastically lower rates of violence.

A new binding mechanism will achieve prevention, protection, and a paradigm shift away from violence and toward human thriving for women and girls, everywhere.

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