

Campaign Brief

The need for a global treaty: a new Optional Protocol to CEDAW to end violence against women and girls

Every Woman Treaty is a global coalition of more than **3,900 women's rights activists and organizations in 147 countries** advancing a new Optional Protocol to CEDAW¹ to end violence against women and girls. (An optional protocol is a type of binding treaty.) We catalyze leadership, from grassroots activists to heads of state, for the development of a global, binding law that will make the world safer for women and girls.

Our signature **Fellowship Program** builds the capacity of advocates in nations around the world to call for the 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, at least one in three women experience intimate partner or sexual violence, a statistic the World Health Organization calls "devastatingly pervasive."² Despite worldwide recognition of the problem and efforts to curb it, this violence persists and is intensifying. Global crises, including pandemics, climate change, and conflict, increase incidents of rape, assault and other forms of violence against women and girls.³ **More than 133 women or girls are killed every day by someone in their own family.**⁴ Recently, UN Women reported that "no country is within reach of eradicating intimate partner violence" and that we as a global community are "failing women and girls."⁵



¹ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

² World Health Organization, "Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence" (News Release, March 9, 2021) <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>.

³ Jane Aeberhard-Hodges, Najla Ayoubi, Francisco J. Rivera Juaristi, *Safer Now* (Every Woman Treaty, February 2023), p7, <https://everywoman.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Safer-Now-v2023.pdf>.

⁴ "Five essential facts to know about femicide," UN Women, November 22, 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/11/five-essential-facts-to-know-about-femicide>.

⁵ Ginette Azcona, Antra Bhatt, et al, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023*, UN Women, (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, September 2023), p 12, 26, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023-en.pdf>.

A binding international law is needed to curb this violence

Three regional treaties on violence against women and girls have been adopted, but they leave nearly 75 percent of women and girls without the protection of a binding framework.⁶ A new Optional Protocol to CEDAW would close this legal gap, creating a binding international law that would work to end violence against women and girls across the globe. Here's why:

- a. **Treaties are effective.** An Optional Protocol is a treaty attached to another treaty. It codifies norms and standards into a binding roadmap.
- b. **They prioritize an issue.** Treaties generate the momentum necessary to develop and implement stronger frameworks for domestic plans of action on an issue.
- c. **A metrics-based reporting approach.** Tracking States' efforts against a set of standard benchmarks can lead to strong outcomes.

A new Optional Protocol to CEDAW is the most expedient path

As the "international bill of rights for women" and one of the most ratified conventions in the world (189 nations), nations' familiarity with CEDAW will serve as a catalyst for dialogue, cooperation and ratification. Moreover, CEDAW General Recommendation 35 provides an expert-driven foundation for a new Optional Protocol, including interventions proven to lower rates of violence against women and girls:

- legal reform;
- training for police, judges, nurses, and doctors;
- violence-prevention education;
- and comprehensive survivor services like shelters and hotlines.

Four Nations, Four Special Rapporteurs Calling for a New Optional Protocol to CEDAW

In December 2023, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Costa Rica, Sierra Leone, and Antigua and Barbuda [issued a joint statement](#) calling for the creation of a new Optional Protocol to CEDAW. These nations lead the [State initiative](#) to bring more nations on board - the next step is moving to drafting and negotiations. The current Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls and three former Special Rapporteurs have also [called for](#) a new Optional Protocol to CEDAW. The current Special Rapporteur [reiterated the call](#) at the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Results

A new Optional Protocol to CEDAW to end violence against women and girls will achieve prevention and protection for women and girls, and a paradigm shift away from violence toward thriving for women and girls, nations and communities, everywhere.

⁶Jane Aeberhard-Hodges, Najla Ayoubi, Francisco J. Rivera Juaristi, *Safer Now* (Every Woman Treaty, February 2023), p18, <https://everywoman.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Safer-Now-v2023.pdf>.