



ODUMUNC 2014
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Furthering Women's Rights in Developing Countries

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Article One of the first chapter of the Charter of the United Nations states that the main purpose of the body is “encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion,” and to promote unity and equality amongst all. Throughout the UN’s history, it has been faced with countless crises involving those distinctions, and still does today. For this topic, we will be focusing on the need for equality of the sexes, especially within developing countries. This discussion will consider a developing country as one who is experiencing political instability and/or has a struggling economy. According to the International Monetary Fund in 2012, around 140 countries are considered developing economies. As former Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated, “a developed country is one that allows all of its citizens to enjoy a free and healthy life in a safe environment.” Tragically, the converse is true in underdeveloped countries, and women suffer because of it.



Every country struggles with maintaining gender equality. Examples range from women in developed countries like the United States and European countries who experience economic and employment disparities to women in the Greater Middle East who experience some of the highest rates of abuse and illiteracy. It is the duty of ECOSOC and the Non-Governmental Organizations to come together and unite the world in the fight for protecting women worldwide from discrimination and violence.

Pertinent Issues

The cycle of poverty that plagues developing nations causes many issues for women across the world. Women worldwide don’t get equal opportunities at employment and salary, leading to economic disparities between genders and in turn a need to turn to more drastic resources for money, such as prostitution or low-wage labor. Even though women are about 50 percent of the world’s population, they represent 70 percent of the world’s poor.

One of the largest issues affecting the women in developing nations is human trafficking. It’s estimated that around 80 percent of victims of human trafficking are women or girls. Political participation is extremely low for women compared to men in most countries, regardless of their development. Without political power, women’s rights will continue to be underappreciated.

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Other rights of women that are stripped from them in many developing countries include the right to property and education. Women's rights to property and education differ from country to country, both in developed and underdeveloped ones. The United Nations, in their Millennium Development Goals Report from 2012, reemphasized that ensuring the rights of all children, but especially girls, is one of the most important factors in improving the overall health of developing nations. In many countries, especially ones in Africa and certain Greater Middle East countries like Afghanistan, women getting education is deemphasized if not illegal. It's also common for women to not be able to own their own property in least developed countries.

If women are unable to progress and gain independence, they won't be able to progress through society. The various issues women face as adults, lack of political participation, poverty, employment disparity, etc..., all can be improved if their rights are improved as girls.

What has the UN done already?

The United Nations has done plenty of work both within their General Assembly bodies and with organizations such as the United Nations *Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women* and *Division for the Advancement of Women*.

In 1979, the UN adopted The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the first large scale international treatise on women's rights. According to its website, "The Convention defines discrimination against women as '...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.'" 187 countries have brought the Convention to ratification, accession, or succession, with the most notable signatory that didn't ratify being the United States.

In 1976, and further strengthened in the next decades, The General Assembly created the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) "as a separate and identifiable entity



in autonomous association with the United Nations Development Programme." This Fund was established to ensure women worldwide have all the resources they need to succeed. UNIFEM has been merged into the UN Women entity, which includes UNIFEM, International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and Division for the Advancement of Women. UN Women has only been formally operation since 2011, so there is plenty of work still to be done within the entity.

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Their goals are as follows:

- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help UN member states implement the above standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To enable member states to hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress

Role of the United Nations Today

It's important for all parts of the issue to be recognized for your committees to create successful resolutions. For example, if only human trafficking is confronted, and nothing is done about the poverty and education of women, the cycle of mistreatment will continue regardless. Similarly, if only long term plans are initiated for relieving economic issues and discrimination, the women of today will continue to suffer.

While the United Nations has put plenty of efforts towards women's rights, an immeasurable amount still needs to be done. By cooperating together, ECOSOC and NGO can create frameworks for international cooperation in order to eradicate current women's rights problems and prevent future ones from occurring. Because the CEDAW has already been ratified and signed by nearly all countries, this is a perfect framework. Ensuring that countries are held accountable for breaking the ideas brought forth in the Convention would be a good start.

Further discussion and improvement of the UN Women entity would be positive for the women in developing nations as well. Since UN Women member states are elected by ECOSOC and they are the main point of governance, it is important that ECOSOC works towards bettering their goals and possibly increase funding or direct it to different places.

Country Positions

While no country would ever hold a position against women's rights, the idea of what women's rights are, and what they are not, can be a highly contentious issue, especially across religious, economic, and cultural boundaries. Nevertheless, the fact that essentially every single country in the UN has ratified or at least signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women shows that cooperation can lead to positive outcomes. A good place to look for specific ECOSOC information is the [Commission on the Status of Women](#), ECOSOC's "policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women."

Africa is a hotbed for women's rights violations and controversy. Poverty leads to desperation, which has caused issues like human trafficking to become enormous problems. Female literacy rates are far lower than men's in nearly every country which clearly sets women back from a young age. Some of the major problem countries include Central African Republic, Sudan and South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Chad. Countries that have more fair treatment of women include South Africa and Zimbabwe. South Africa has women occupying nearly 50

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percent of seats in the lower house of parliament, but also have a tragically high rate of sexual offenses against women. Many African governments welcome development assistance aimed at women. Others resent foreign intrusion in their sovereign affairs and disruption of cultural norms.

Asia has a mixture of developing and developed countries, as well as ones that maintain a lot of power while having plenty of economic disparity. This economic disparity has led to many women's issues within the region, especially human trafficking and discrimination in the workforce and education. Russia, China, and the rest of the region's main issues within their country are domestic abuse and trafficking.

The Pacific islands have issues with gender disparity in terms of economy and treatment in society as well. In Indonesia, for instance, women only receive 38 percent of earned income. Human trafficking is a huge issue in these countries as well, but most are willing to cooperate with the women's rights resolutions presented by the United Nations.

The Greater Middle East is a difficult region in terms of women's rights because there are many countries in this area that have very strict religious views that must be taken in to consideration. In Saudi Arabia, for example, women aren't even allowed to drive. The majority of countries have very traditional values that include women wearing non-revealing clothing and maintaining domestic roles.



Many countries are just recently allowing women to vote in elections. Clearly no Middle Eastern country would support a resolution that required all women had the right to do things that went against Islam in the eyes of the leaders. Egypt has recently been outspokenly against the United Nations' statements regarding outlawing violence against women and equality between the genders. Iran is one of seven countries that have not ratified the CEDAW.

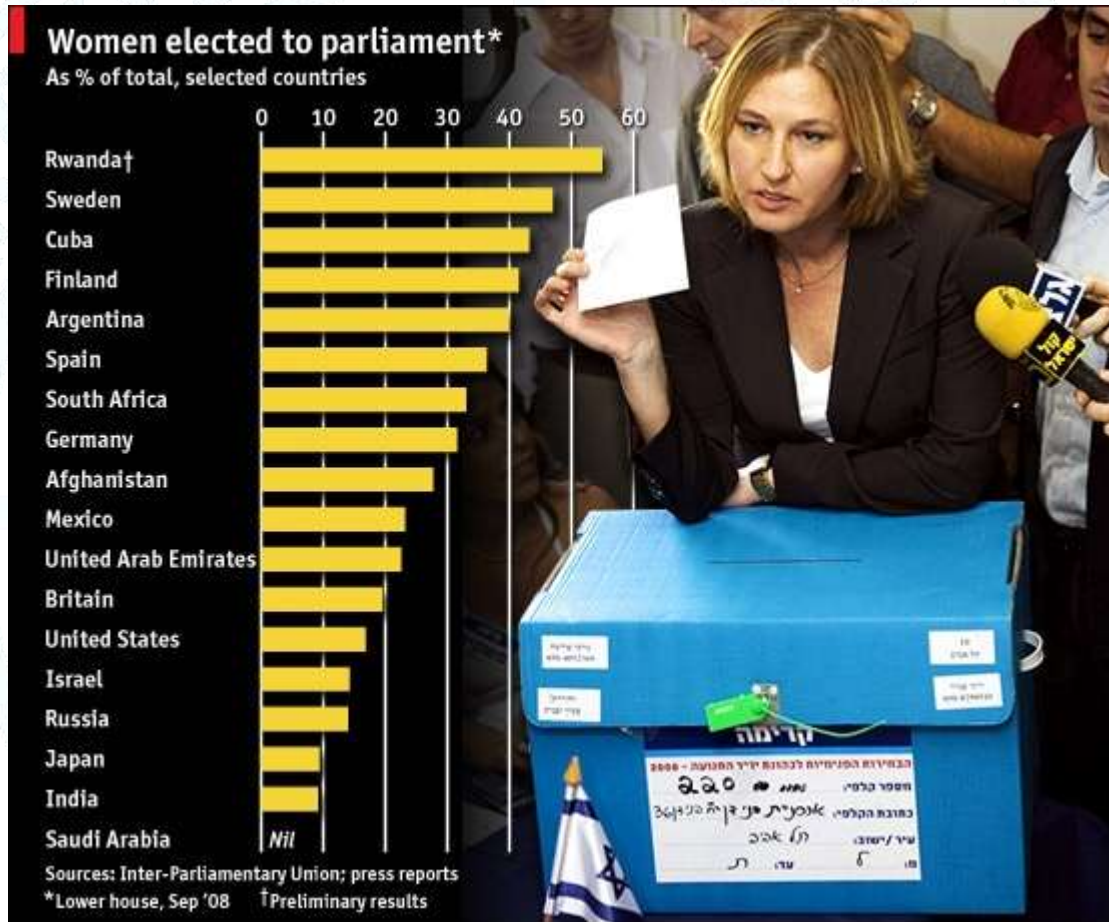
Latin American states also have certain areas with strong religious convictions. Many countries still have struggling economies as well, which leads to the economic disparity that plagues much of the world. Women, in turn, often rarely have opportunities to improve their circumstances on their own. However, there are no countries in this region considered a "least developed country" except Haiti. Countries in Latin America have generally not been the focus of the UN's fight for women's rights, and the region is generally open to resolutions revolving equality. Their conservative values don't exactly match the values of other more progressive developed nations, however.

Developed countries in Western European and North American countries, having the strongest economies, also have some of the best records on women's rights. However, they often don't agree on how far regulations should go. Furthermore, countries in the most developed countries have issues revolving around the importation of trafficked women for multiple purposes, especially prostitution, and economic and healthcare disparity between women and

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men. There also is growing unhappiness with creating new international obligations which must be funded by Western governments, obligations they increasingly hesitate to finance.

Figure 1. Women in Parliament



Nongovernmental Organization Positions

NGOs like Women Trafficking and Child Labor Eradication Foundation, Women and Children Development Organization, Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International all directly concern themselves with women's rights in developing countries through awareness campaigns and publicizing violations of women's rights.

Many other NGOs focus on the promotion and strengthening of all people in conflicted and struggling regions. Since eradicating poverty tends to lead to an eradication of human rights violations against women, these NGOs have an important place in this discussion. They include ActionAid, Catholic Relief Services, CARE International, Institute for International Economic Cooperation and Development, Islamic Relief, and Oxfam International.

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Economic development and equal rights for all are two goals at the heart of every issue, regardless of NGO. By helping ECOSOC ensure the safety and progression of women, NGOs can bring positive change around the world in every facet of developing countries.

Many NGOs maintain that women's issues will be addressed effectively only when *women are well-represented in government* and other prominent institutions. They are pressing demands for statutory inclusion of women in government (in parliament, the military and/or the civil service) and other institutions. For many countries this requires constitutional adjustments, which not all are enthusiastic about. There is considerable opposition to these proposals, but also strong support.

Among the most ambitious NGO proposals are calls to create regional or country *women's rights observatories*, to monitor problems and progress on issues affecting women, including violence against women, access to education, early marriage, access to medical care, and issues relating to human trafficking. Several major issues need to be revolved including:

- How are observatories staffed (with NGO personnel or government officials, with foreign or host-country nationals)?
- How do they report (to the host country government or international organizations)?
- Responsibility to react (can observatory reports be ignored?),
- Management and oversight (do host governments have a say in how they are run, will they accept them if they don't?),
- How are they financed (will funding detract from other development and human rights goals)?

Not all NGOs agree on proposal like Parliamentary Representation and Observatories. Some maintain that women really need provision of fundamental human rights, above all access to food, water and basic social services. In other words, women benefit disproportionately from basic economic development, and that should be the first priority of the international community.

Figure. Women in the Tunisian Parliament-, 23 November 2011



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