



CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

Human Rights of Women

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The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) established the landmark Beijing Platform for Action with the global goals of equality, development, and peace. Among the twelve Areas of Concern, the section on the Human Rights of Women included **three strategic objectives**:

1. Promote and protect the human rights of women, through the full implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
2. Ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice
3. Achieve legal literacy.¹

All nations, including the United States, share the same challenge: since human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings, their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of governments (paragraph 210). The Platform for Action reaffirms that all human rights - civil, cultural, economic, political and social - are **universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated**, as expressed in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights (para 213). Human rights intersect at multiple points with the other Beijing Platform Areas of Concern: women and poverty, education, health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, women and the media, women and the environment, and the girl-child.

We focus here on the laws and strategies that position the United States as a global leader for women's human rights. In consonance with the Beijing Platform's first human rights strategic objective, the United States has ratified and endorsed the following **international documents that embody women's human rights**:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), presented to the General Assembly by former US First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt
- The Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Civil Rights to Women (1948)
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ratified 1994)
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) as well as Beijing +5, +10, +15, +20, and +25
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000)
- The Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal #5 on Gender Equality (2015)

At the same time, the United States has not fully complied with the Beijing Platform call (paras 230-a, 230-b) to join international and regional human rights treaties including:

- The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, one of only 7 UN member states that have not ratified CEDAW.²
- The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), one of only 3 countries of the Organization of American States that have not joined the treaty.³

The United States is the only UN member state that has not acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), called for by the Beijing Platform in paragraph 230-I.⁴

The Beijing Platform second human rights strategic objective calls on member states to ensure equality for women under their national laws (para 232-c). The United States has enacted several outstanding pieces of **legislation to safeguard women's human rights** nationally including:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)
- The Family and Medical Leave Act (1993)

- The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994, reauthorized in 2000, 2005, 2013, and 2022.
- The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act (2009)
- The Affordable Care Act (2010)
- The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017

Despite these important advances, the United States has taken steps that backtrack on women’s human rights such as the [US Supreme Court decision *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*](#) (2022) removing constitutional guarantees for women’s reproductive healthcare. In the aftermath of that high court decision, many US states passed laws limiting women’s access to abortion services, with twenty states that were very restrictive or most restrictive according to the Guttmacher Institute.⁵

The Beijing Platform for Action calls for member states to provide constitutional guarantees to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex (para 232-b). The US Constitution lacks an explicit guarantee of women’s human rights. A constitutional amendment to provide that guarantee, the [Equal Rights Amendment](#), has been ratified by three-fourths of US states, with Virginia ratifying in 2020 as the 38th state.⁶ Despite meeting the constitution requirements, the Equal Rights Amendment has not been formally recognized as part of the US Constitution. In the absence of a national equal rights guarantee, many US states have enacted state-level guarantees, with twenty states having a full equal rights guarantee.⁷ A comprehensive New York state amendment approved in the November 2024 election specifies that equal rights include “sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, reproductive health care, and autonomy.”⁸

Another provision of the Beijing Platform for Action human rights approach is to create [national action plans](#) to identify steps to improve the protection of women’s human rights (para 230-d). The White House Gender Policy Council has developed two comprehensive plans to set out strategies to advance women’s equality, including the *National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality* (2021)⁹ and the *National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* (2023).¹⁰

The *National Strategy* outlines an agenda to help “close pernicious gender gaps”¹¹ and highlights those women who face barriers to their human rights: “The restaurant worker organizing for fair wages. The migrant farmworker putting food on our tables. The girl studying hard, despite the barriers that stand in her way, to discover the next vaccine or scientific breakthrough in the fight against climate change. The millions of frontline workers - disproportionately women - whose heroic work in our hospitals, grocery stores, schools, childcare centers, domestic violence shelters, nursing homes, and elsewhere kept us going during one of the darkest periods in recent history.”¹² The strategy expresses concern for those long denied their rightful opportunities: “women and girls of color, LGBTQI+ people, people with disabilities, and all of those whose lives are affected by persistent poverty and inequality.”¹³

The US Women’s Caucus supports the strategies that are detailed in the *National Strategy* and *National Plan* reports, including their “whole-of-government” approach to implementation. Prioritizing women’s human rights would bring the United States closer to adopting the Equal Rights Amendment into the US Constitution, ratifying and implementing CEDAW, upholding accountability through the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review, and affirming equal rights of all women and girls.

¹ United Nations 1995. *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.

² United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies 2024. *Ratification Status for CEDAW*.

³ Organization of American States 2024. *Status of Signatures and Ratifications, Convention of Belem do Para*.

⁴ United Nations Treaty Collection 2024. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

⁵ Guttmacher Institute 2024. *US Abortion Policies and Access After Roe*.

⁶ Center for American Progress 2024. *What Comes Next for the Equal Rights Amendment?*

⁷ The Brennan Center for Justice 2024. *State-Level Equal Rights Amendments*.

⁸ League of Women Voters 2024. *The New York Equal Rights Amendment*.

⁹ White House Gender Policy Council 2021. *National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality*

¹⁰ White House Gender Policy Council 2023. *US National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*.

¹¹ White House Gender Policy Council 2021.

¹² White House Gender Policy Council 2021.

¹³ White House Gender Policy Council 2021.