

Family Care International

Statement to the Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law of the Senate Judiciary Committee
in support of U.S. ratification of the
Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

November 12, 2010

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Coburn, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Family Care International (FCI) is a U.S.-based international NGO dedicated to making pregnancy and childbirth safer around the world. We have been working for more than two decades, with partners in the U.S. and around the world, in pursuit of our vision: a world where no woman suffers preventable injury or death from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes, and in which all people are able to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We submit this statement to express FCI's strong support for U.S. ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

FCI is a signatory to the submission by the CEDAW Task Force, which argues for the powerfully positive effect of CEDAW in the 186 countries that have already ratified it, and the pressing need for the U.S. to reaffirm its leadership on human rights. We submit this separate statement because FCI is uniquely positioned, as one of the world's leading voices for maternal health, to bring one additional point to the Subcommittee's attention: By placing the force of world opinion squarely behind women's fundamental rights, CEDAW is an essential tool for reducing deaths and injuries in pregnancy and childbirth. U.S. ratification will immensely strengthen CEDAW's power to save lives.

Every day, a thousand women die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth — one every ninety seconds. This unconscionable daily toll of loss devastates families, depletes communities, and saps the economic vitality and productivity of developing countries. Almost all these deaths are preventable, caused by illness or injury that is prevented or treated in the U.S. as a matter of course. Women are dying because they are deprived of access to family planning, pre-natal care, skilled childbirth care, and emergency treatment for pregnancy and childbirth complications. This lack of access to essential care reflects glaring inequalities in health care and education, gender discrimination, and violence — factors that too often prevent women from making their own decisions about their health care and about whether and when to have children. CEDAW affirms that women's rights are human rights, the fundamental principles of equality for women and girls, and the responsibility of nations and governments to ensure equality and human rights. When women's rights are respected, maternal deaths are extremely rare, as they should and must be everywhere.

Recently, FCI joined in UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's call for accelerated progress in reducing maternal and child mortality through the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health, which is firmly rooted in a human rights framework. Many governments made strong commitments to this historic initiative; all of them, with the exception of the United States, have ratified CEDAW. Those countries recognize that, by providing a practical blueprint for women's progress, CEDAW has led to real gains for women in many countries around the world.

We believe that ratifying CEDAW will make the U.S. a stronger advocate for women around the world, a more powerful voice for human rights, and a more effective leader in the essential work of improving women's and children's health and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We urge the Subcommittee, the Judiciary Committee, and the full Senate to move forward now with ratification of CEDAW.