

Saudi Arabia Becomes a Signatory to CEDAW

Saudi Arabia signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in October. As expected, some reservations were introduced because they were in contradiction to Saudi Law namely with regards to women giving their nationality to their children and freely choosing their husbands. During the past couple of years, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been moving towards securing more rights to its women citizens. (Nad Regional News, October 2-8, 2000)

Jordan Highest Rates of Honor Crimes

Jordan still ranks highest in the world when it comes to honor killing rates. Twenty victims were killed this year, by their relatives, in an attempt to cleanse the honor of the family. This year's death toll is no different than the previous year where 20 Jordanian women lost their lives in similar crimes. According to Rana Husseini: "We are currently studying, together with the government, a new strategy to obtain the abrogation of this law in 2001." (Nad Regional News, December 4-31, 2000)

News Release Issued by the International Secretariat of Amnesty International

As of today, a woman whose human rights have been violated under the Women's Convention will be able to take her complaint to the UN to seek justice and reparation, Amnesty International said today welcoming the entry into force of the Convention's Optional Protocol.

Until now there was no right to individual petition under the Women's Convention (formally known as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. They must have already exhausted domestic remedies and the state accused of the violation must be party to both the protocol and the convention.

Women whose rights under the Women's Convention have been violated may petition the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. They must have already exhausted domestic remedies and the state accused of the violation must be party to both the Protocol and the Convention. The Committee may also initiate a confidential inquiry procedure into alleged grave or systematic violations.

The Committee will make findings against a state party which are likely to include recommendations ensuring that justice is served and reparation is made. The state party will be obliged to report to the Committee on its progress in implementing the recommendations.

"The Women's Convention already speaks powerfully to the nature and extent of discrimination experienced by women simply because they are women, and imposes legal obligations on states to prevent and prohibit such discrimination. Now, with the advent of the Optional Protocol, women who are the actual victims of human rights violations will have a louder voice to project across the international stage." Amnesty International welcomed that 13 states have ratified the Optional Protocol and 62 have signed it so far.

Amnesty International will continue to campaign for the ratification of the Optional Protocol. "Governments should be reminded that women's rights are human rights, as they themselves reaffirmed at the Special Session of the General Assembly in June marking Beijing +5. We urge those governments that have not yet done so to sign and ratify this protocol without further delay."

Background

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Women's Convention) was adopted by the UN General Assembly and opened for signature on Human Rights Day, 20 December 1999. It enters into force, on 22 December 2000, three months after the deposit with the UN Secretary General of the 10th instrument of ratification. As of December it has been signed by 62 states and ratified by 13 (Austria, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Mali, Namibia, New Zealand, Senegal, Slovakia, Thailand).

The Women's Convention was adopted in 1979 and has 166 states parties. Article 17 of the Convention establishes a committee of 23 independent experts of "high moral standing and competence in the field covered by the Convention," who together review the reports that state parties are required to submit periodically on their compliance with the Convention. This is the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

In June 2000 the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly was convened to appraise and assess the progress achieved since the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. (22 December, 2000)