

Empowering Women Across the Globe: Assessing Status and Progress through Global Initiatives

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Abstract

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) has been a driving force in the global movement for gender equality and women's empowerment since its establishment in 1946. Rooted in the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Commission has played a pivotal role in advocating for women's rights, raising awareness about gender-based discrimination, and promoting policy reforms to address the challenges faced by women worldwide. This abstract provides an overview of the Commission's history, major achievements, and ongoing efforts to advance gender equality. It highlights the Commission's role in drafting the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and mainstreaming gender perspectives in national and international policymaking. Additionally, the abstract underscores the importance of collective action in addressing the multifaceted barriers to women's rights and calls for continued commitment to the principles of equality, dignity, and justice for all.

Keywords: United Nations, Empowerment, Discrimination, Charter, Policy-Making.

Introduction:

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) stands as a beacon of hope and progress in the ongoing struggle for gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. Established in 1946, the Commission has played a pivotal role in advancing the rights and status of women across the globe, spearheading initiatives, advocating for policy reforms, and fostering international cooperation to address the challenges faced by women in diverse spheres of life.

Rooted in the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, which affirms the equal rights of men and women, the Commission has been at the forefront of promoting gender equality as a fundamental human right. From its inaugural meeting at Lake Success, New York, in 1947, the Commission has been instrumental in amplifying the voices of women,

advocating for legal protections, and raising awareness about the status and situation of women worldwide.

Throughout its 60-year history, the Commission has achieved significant milestones in the advancement of women's rights. One of its crowning achievements is the pivotal role it played in the drafting and adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. This landmark treaty has served as a cornerstone of international efforts to combat gender-based discrimination and promote women's rights, inspiring legal and policy reforms in numerous countries.

Moreover, the Commission has been a driving force behind the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in national and international policymaking processes. Through its advocacy and awareness-raising efforts, the Commission has catalyzed changes in attitudes and norms, leading to greater recognition of women's contributions to economic, social, and political development.

In addition to its advocacy work, the Commission serves as a platform for dialogue, exchange, and collaboration among governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. Through its annual sessions, expert panels, and roundtable discussions, the Commission provides a forum for sharing best practices, lessons learned, and innovative solutions to address the multifaceted challenges facing women and girls.

As we reflect on the achievements of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, we are reminded of the enduring importance of collective action in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. Despite significant progress, much work remains to be done to realize the vision of a world where every woman and girl can exercise her rights and fulfill her potential.

In the pages that follow, we explore the Commission's major achievements, the global challenges and opportunities in upholding women's rights, and the ongoing struggle for gender equality in diverse cultural, social, and political contexts. Through these insights, we reaffirm our commitment to the principles of equality, dignity, and justice for all, and we call upon governments, institutions, and individuals to join us in the journey towards a more equitable and inclusive world.

The United Nations Commission on The Status of Women:

The United Nations' commitment to the advancement of women began with the signing of the United Nations Charter in San Francisco in 1945. Its Preamble declared faith "in fundamental

human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small..."

In 1946 the Commission on the Status of Women was established to promote the advancement of women throughout the world. The Commission met for the first time at Lake Success, New York, in February 1947.

Initially, the Commission focused on legal measures to protect the human rights of women and awareness-raising on the status and situation of women around the world. Debates in the Commission brought unfamiliar issues into the international political arena. From the very beginning, the work of the Commission attracted the interest, participation and support of the growing international women's movement.

By the mid 1960s, the Commission had begun to address women's role in economic and social development. Delegates from developing countries drew attention in particular to the situation of women in rural areas and the need to enhance their contributions and address their priorities and needs.

In 1975, at the urging of the Commission and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations observed International Women's Year with the theme "Equality, Development and Peace". The culmination of the year was the first global Women's Conference in Mexico City which adopted a global plan of action to improve the status of women.

The United Nations Decade for Women from 1976-1985, and the following world conferences on women, created an unprecedented momentum for change. The Platform for Action adopted in Beijing in 1995 consolidated the consensus and commitments achieved through the work of the Commission.

In summary, the United Nations' commitment to advancing women's rights, from its inception with the signing of the Charter in 1945 to the present, has evolved into a global force for gender equality. Through landmark initiatives and conferences, it has catalyzed meaningful progress towards a more inclusive and equitable world.

Major Achievements of United Nations Commission on The Status of Women:

The Commission's 60-year history is marked by significant achievements. The Commission ensured that provisions for equality between women and men were included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - a milestone in the struggle for equality.

In 1979, after four years of preparatory work by the Commission, the General Assembly adopted the historic Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against

Women (CEDAW). This landmark treaty entered into force in 1981 and by early June 2006 had been ratified by 183 countries. The Optional Protocol to the Convention was adopted by the General Assembly in 1999. The fact that 79 States were party to this instrument by early June 2006 attests to the willingness of Governments to adhere to the terms of the Convention. The Convention has been an inspiration for women in all parts of the world. It has had a positive impact on legal and policy development at national level, for example through the strengthening of provisions in constitutions, the establishment of commissions to review legislation, and the development of temporary special measures to enhance women's participation in different areas.

The Commission has played a critical catalytic role in promoting gender mainstreaming at national level and within the United Nations system. The positive outcomes can be seen in the attention to gender perspectives in other functional commissions of ECOSOC, the role ECOSOC plays in promoting and monitoring the implementation of gender mainstreaming, the work of the General Assembly on the human rights of women, as well as the path-breaking work of the Security Council on women, peace and security.

The Commission continues to provide unique opportunities for exchange of ideas, experiences, good practices and lessons-learned to enhance implementation of commitments at national level, through interactive expert panels on the themes under consideration and roundtables for high level representatives attending the annual sessions.

In its 60-year history, the Commission on the Status of Women has left an indelible mark on the global landscape of gender equality. From its pivotal role in shaping the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the landmark adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Commission has been at the forefront of advancing women's rights worldwide.

The widespread ratification of CEDAW and its Optional Protocol underscores the international community's commitment to upholding gender equality and combating discrimination. The Convention has not only served as a beacon of inspiration but has also catalyzed tangible progress, influencing legal and policy frameworks at the national level and fostering the adoption of measures to enhance women's participation and rights.

Moreover, the Commission's advocacy for gender mainstreaming within national and international institutions has yielded significant dividends, evident in the integration of gender perspectives across various sectors and the groundbreaking initiatives spearheaded by

bodies like the ECOSOC and the Security Council.

As the Commission continues to provide platforms for dialogue, exchange, and collaboration, it remains a vital force in advancing the implementation of commitments and the realization of gender equality worldwide. Through expert panels, roundtables, and interactive sessions, it facilitates the sharing of best practices and lessons learned, ensuring that the journey towards gender parity remains guided by collective wisdom and shared aspirations.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights and the dignity of all individuals, aiming to promote social progress and freedom for all. Its main articles include:

- All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights, endowed with reason and conscience.
- Everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind.
- Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.
- No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.
- All are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection without discrimination.
- Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by competent national tribunals for violations of their rights.
- No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile.
- Everyone charged with a penal offense has the right to a fair and public trial.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.
- Everyone has the right to education, which shall be free and directed to the full development of human personality.

These articles uphold the principles of dignity, equality, and justice for all, regardless of race, color, gender, language, religion, or social status, reflecting the collective aspiration for a just and equitable society.

Leading the Charge: Countries at the Forefront of Women's Voting Rights and Status of India

Saudi Arabia, in 2011, became the most recent country in 21st century to grant women's

suffrage and also lifted the ban on women's driving in June 2018.

Women constitute more than half of the human race and play a crucial role in all spheres of life. The reality check of growth of any nation lies not only in its economic growth but crucially in the status of its women. Let's take a look at the first five countries which granted women the right to vote:

1. New Zealand

- On September 19, 1893, the governor Lord Glasgow, signed a new Electoral Act into law. As a result of this landmark legislation, New Zealand became the first self-governing country in the world to grant women the right to vote in parliamentary elections.
- After nearly a 100 years, in 1997, Jenny Shipley became New Zealand's first female prime minister
- In the early 21st century, women have held each of the country's key constitutional positions: the prime minister, governor-general, speaker of the House of Representatives, attorney-general, and chief justice
- In the 2014 elections, the percentage of female parliament members rose to 31 per cent as compared with 9 per cent in 1981.

2. Australia

- Nine years later, Australia followed suit and also passed a suffrage act for women, after independence from Great Britain.
- This act took effect in 1902, and though it did apply to all women in the new country, aboriginal women were left out
- Aborigines, male and female, did not have the right to vote until 1962
- Aboriginal women are indigenous people that were descended from groups that existed in Australia and surrounding islands before British colonisation

3. Finland

- Finland was the first European country to join the league of more progressive nations in 1906

- The country was previously called as the Grand Duchy of Finland. Women had enjoyed voting rights before, under the Swedish and Russian rule
- But what was unique about the 1906 ruling was that while Finland granted women's suffrage, it became the first country in the world to also grant women the right to stand for parliament.

4. Norway

- Norway granted suffrage to women in 1913, though the men in the nation were voting since 1898
- The suffrage movement in Norway was led by Gina Krog, who helped pioneer a law in 1901 that would allow some women to vote
- However, the requirements were that these women must have paid a certain amount of taxes or be married to a man who paid that same amount
- Not satisfied with this condition, Gina Krog and other women continued fighting for the next 12 years.

5. Denmark

- Parliament in Denmark began discussing women's suffrage in 1886 although the right was limited to tax-paying women living in Copenhagen
- This led to the formation of Women's Suffrage Association, which held public meetings to discuss women's rights and questioned parliamentary candidates about their views on the matter
- Denmark finally granted women suffrage in 1915.

Saudi Arabia, in 2011, became the most recent country in 21st century to grant women's suffrage and also lifted the ban on women's driving in June 2018, which was a much-needed step. The journey for women's right to vote in India paralleled the struggle for independence, led by prominent figures like Sarojini Naidu and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Despite challenges, the Constitution of India, enacted in 1950, established universal adult suffrage. Women participated in the first general elections in 1952, marking a significant milestone in India's democratic journey. This right symbolizes the resilience of Indian women and underscores the nation's commitment to gender equality in governance.

Gender disparities globally impede women's access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and political engagement, hindering progress in ecological sustainability,

financial stability, global well-being, and human rights. UN research highlights women's disproportionate illiteracy and refugee status, as well as their limited asset ownership and income. In Indian cultural ethos, women are revered, with literature and cinema offering insights into their roles and identities. These creative mediums, along with research publications, expose the pervasive nature of gender inequality, urging society to confront and dismantle oppressive systems to ensure women's dignity, equality, and opportunities.

The Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951: A Landmark in Gender Equality

The Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951, represents a pivotal moment in the pursuit of gender equality within the global labor force. Convened by the General Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva during its Thirty-fourth Session on June 6, 1951, the Convention emerged as a beacon of hope for millions of workers worldwide. At its core, the Convention aimed to address the pervasive issue of wage disparities between men and women by asserting the principle that individuals should receive equal pay for work of equal value, irrespective of gender. By codifying this principle into international law, the Convention sought to dismantle systemic discrimination in wages and foster a more equitable labor market.

Key provisions outlined in the Convention included the mandate for member states to ensure equal remuneration, a recognition of the diverse nature of labor, and the implementation of mechanisms to monitor and report on progress. The Convention's impact was profound, inspiring legislative reforms, collective bargaining initiatives, and societal shifts towards recognizing and valuing women's contributions in the workforce. Its legacy endures as a guiding force in the ongoing fight for gender equality in remuneration and underscores the importance of upholding the inherent worth of all workers, regardless of gender.

Upholding Women's Rights: Global Challenges and Opportunities

Pressing challenges like climate change and armed conflict cannot be overcome if half of the world's population does not enjoy equal rights and opportunities, the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) heard today, as it commenced its debate on the advancement of women.

World leaders assembled at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, emphasized their commitment to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. The 2005 World Summit reiterated this resolve to eliminate discrimination against women and renewed commitment to the gender mainstreaming strategy.

The Platform for Action continues to represent the global policy framework for gender equality and empowerment of women and guides the work of Member States, the United Nations, international and regional bodies, and civil society. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides the normative framework. The synergies between the two instruments were recognized by the Commission on the Status of Women in its 49th session and are regularly highlighted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. A major challenge for the Commission is ensuring accountability for implementation of existing policy recommendations and human rights standards at national level.

The framework of the Millennium Development Goals provide new opportunities for the Commission's work through mobilization of governments, international organizations and NGOs around time-bound, measurable targets, and through increasing the visibility of gender issues in national development planning and reporting, facilitating the development of alliances with new partners and increasing access to resources.

The Commission on the Status of Women has been an untiring advocate for gender equality and empowerment of women across the globe. It has provided a unique space for exchange of national experience and good practice and for bringing the voice of the women's movement to the United Nations. The Commission will continue to play a critical leadership role to ensure that the work of the United Nations has a positive impact on the lives of women at country level and remains a driving force for gender equality and empowerment of women.

In the modern era, as the world grapples with the complexities of progress and equality, the struggle for women's rights persists as a central battleground. Despite significant strides towards gender equality in various parts of the globe, numerous women continue to face barriers in accessing fundamental rights and opportunities. As the Third Committee of the United Nations emphasizes the critical importance of ensuring access to citizenship, education, work, and justice for women worldwide, recent events, particularly in Afghanistan, serve as a stark reminder of the ongoing challenges faced by women and girls globally.

The issue of women's rights transcends geographical boundaries, cultural differences, and political ideologies. Across continents, women confront systemic inequalities that hinder their ability to fully participate in society. In many regions, women are still denied the basic right to citizenship, depriving them of legal recognition and essential services. Without citizenship,

women are often rendered invisible, vulnerable to exploitation, and unable to access education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Education stands as a cornerstone of empowerment, yet millions of girls worldwide are denied access to quality education due to discriminatory practices, cultural norms, and economic constraints. The denial of education perpetuates cycles of poverty and reinforces gender disparities, limiting the potential of entire communities and societies. Moreover, education serves as a catalyst for social change, empowering women to challenge oppressive structures and advocate for their rights.

The right to work is not merely an economic imperative but a fundamental human right essential for the dignity and autonomy of women. Despite progress in labor laws and policies, women continue to face discrimination, harassment, and unequal pay in the workplace. Additionally, women are disproportionately affected by informal and precarious employment, lacking job security and social protections. Achieving gender parity in the workforce requires concerted efforts to dismantle systemic barriers and create inclusive environments that value women's contributions and leadership.

Access to justice is integral to safeguarding women's rights and addressing gender-based violence and discrimination. However, legal systems often fail to provide adequate protection and redress for women who experience violence or discrimination. Cultural norms, social stigma, and institutional biases further impede women's access to justice, perpetuating cycles of impunity and injustice. Ensuring equal access to legal recourse and support services is paramount in upholding women's rights and promoting accountability for perpetrators of gender-based violence.

Amidst global efforts to advance women's rights, recent developments in Afghanistan serve as a sobering reminder of the fragility of progress and the urgency of action. The issuance of multiple edicts by Afghan authorities, curtailing the rights and freedoms of women and girls, is a grave violation of human rights and a setback for gender equality. Such regressive measures not only undermine the gains made in women's empowerment but also pose a threat to peace, stability, and development in the region.

In response to these challenges, the international community must reaffirm its collective commitment to promoting and protecting women's rights. Diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, and targeted interventions can exert leverage on governments to uphold their obligations under international law and respect the rights of women and girls. Moreover,

investing in grassroots initiatives, women-led organizations, and community-based solutions is essential in addressing the root causes of gender inequality and empowering women at the local level.

Ultimately, achieving gender equality requires a comprehensive and intersectional approach that addresses the multifaceted barriers faced by women and girls worldwide. By prioritizing access to citizenship, education, work, and justice, and by holding governments and institutions accountable for their actions, we can build a more just, equitable, and inclusive world for future generations. As the Third Committee underscores the importance of collective action, let us stand in solidarity with women everywhere in their pursuit of dignity, equality, and justice.

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