

The Women's Parliament
CEDAW – Women's Rights, Government Responsibility, Parliamentary Action
A Women's Bill of Rights

This Women's Parliament held in Buckingham, England on Wednesday 6 March during the United Nations International Women's Day month of action:

1. Notes that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was signed by the United Kingdom in 1981, ratified by the United Kingdom in 1986, the Optional Protocol agreed to by the United Kingdom in 2004, with ratification committing the government to advance, protect, promote and fulfil the human rights of women under all circumstances, including each and every provision of CEDAW, thereby giving an undertaking to incorporate the principles and provisions of CEDAW fully and effectively into domestic law.
2. Observes that despite this commitment and undertaking, legislative recognition by domestication is not yet realised and there remains no full and effective legislative provision nor substantive equality in practice between women and men in the United Kingdom today, in the absence of which women remain vulnerable to a lack of rights or effective action in implementation of rights consistent with CEDAW.
3. Refers to the Motion of the Women's Parliament passed unanimously on International Women's Day 8 March 2022, endorsing CEDAW's provisions, in particular but not only by reference to the Abortion Act 1967, the Equal Pay Act of 1970, the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the Equality Act 2010, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and demanding government and parliamentary action in introducing and passing a Women's Bill of Rights incorporating all CEDAW provisions and General Recommendations of the CEDAW Committee sitting in Geneva;
4. Refers to the Motion of the Women's Parliament passed unanimously on 8 December 2022 during the 16 Days of Action Against and to End Violence Against Women, and seeking government action to comply with the signing and ratification of CEDAW by introducing a Women's Bill of Rights and taking effective action to address, combat and end violence against women in all its forms.
5. Refers to the Motion of the Women's Parliament passed unanimously on 8 March 2023 on International Women's Day seeking government and parliamentary action to ensure women's economic independence and to close the wages gap and the pensions gap, and to introduce and pass a Women's Bill of Rights consistent with CEDAW and the CEDAW Committee General Recommendations.
6. Recognises that the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) outlaws both direct (unequal treatment) and indirect ('equal' treatment) discrimination between women and men in all aspects of life, including in education and training; employment; facilities, goods and services; accommodation; membership and activities of clubs; administration of laws and programmes; and the media, and that unless and until the provisions of CEDAW are

fully and effectively implemented, by introducing a Women's Bill of Rights, discrimination against women in all its forms will continue without a real, effective chance of being ended.

7. Recognising that discrimination against women is too often constituted by:
 - (i) vilification and misogyny, rape and other sexual offences, criminal assault at home and other forms of domestic violence, marital murder and dishonour crimes, and the killing by women of a spouse or partner or former spouse or partner;
 - (ii) online violence, exploitation, victimisation and abuse, stalking and all social media abuses including vilification and misogyny;
 - (iii) sexual harassment, sexist harassment and bullying;

demands recognition of women and girls' rights to just and effective laws in principle and operating in practice to end these human rights abuses.

8. Further, demands that funding and resourcing of women's services in all areas of women's lives, including services for Black and minoritised women, trafficked and prostituted women, asylum seeking and refugee women, women with a disability and all disadvantaged groups of women, be set at levels proper and appropriate for care, support, protection, and advancement to independence of women, measured by reference to continuing inequality between women and men and aiming to end this inequality through, amongst other measures, funding and resources enabling their implementation of policies, practices and actions to end this inequality.
9. Demands that all governments – national, devolved and local – and the private sector recognise concretely and effectively their responsibility and role in ending the wages gap and the pensions gap by ensuring implementation of equal opportunity in education and employment, in wages and pensions provision and generally in ending employment, administration and business practices which elevate male-dominant perspectives and conduct, seen most readily in sexual and sexist harassment, discriminatory appointments and promotions, organisation of the workplace into 'male' and 'female' jobs, lack of recognition of the value of traditional women's jobs as equal to that of traditional men's jobs, and failure to address the pay gap and the pensions gap to ensure equal pay and equal pension or superannuation rights for women.
10. Calls upon all governments – national, devolved, and local - to take a leading role in ensuring that a Women's Bill of Rights is introduced and passed by the Parliament with consistent Women's Rights Bills passed by the devolved authorities of Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and local government authorities around the United Kingdom to ensure that their policies and practices are consistent with the provisions of CEDAW and the General Recommendations.

BACKGROUND

CEDAW – INCORPORATION INTO DOMESTIC LAW

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), is an international human rights treaty, in 1979 elevating to Convention Status the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The UK signed the Convention in 1981, ratifying it in 1986 and entering into the Optional Protocol in 2004. The Convention has been implemented through United Kingdom domestic law, albeit ratification is the step by which governments make an undertaking to do so, hence the United Kingdom being under such obligation since 1986.

CEDAW creates a Committee (the CEDAW Committee) which oversees its operation and implementation, amongst other matters monitoring signatory states' progress on its implementation. No United Kingdom representative has been nominated to sit on the CEDAW Committee, exposing a gap in government recognition of the Committee.

Every woman and girl in the United Kingdom should be able to realise, as of right, her true potential. Another 40 years cannot be allowed to lapse before action is taken by the United Kingdom consistent with its undertaking. Lack of firm, concrete and comprehensive legislative enactment and implementation of CEDAW serves only to imply or create the impression that the United Kingdom government and Parliament are oblivious to the inequality of and harms committed against women and girls as women and girls. There is no reason why CEDAW cannot be transposed into domestic law and, the United Kingdom having made that undertaking, the delay in doing so is unconscionable.

This Women's Parliament is designed to build on and contribute to the campaign for a Women's Bill of Rights to ensure that CEDAW (and its General Recommendations (GRs) is legislated and implemented domestically through the United Kingdom by the Parliament and insofar as the devolved authorities have scope to do so, by Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

On 16 July 2020, The CEDAW People's Tribunal was established to examine the failure to integrate CEDAW into UK domestic legislation. The Tribunal heard evidence from witnesses over 21-23 June 2021, with the President's Report incorporating the evidence and making recommendations for domestication and associated legislative and policy implementation of CEDAW (plus GRs): [President's Report @CEDAWinLAW](#) (accessed 18 February 2024)

The CEDAW People's Tribunal evolved amid austerity and the pandemic because women's rights are being further diminished and women are suffering a disproportionate impact in both financial and social terms. This further exposed the injustice lying in the wages gap and the pensions gap, and specifically the impact of the Pension Act 1995, Pension Act 2007 and Pension Act 2011 equalising the male and female Pension Age from 60 (women) to 66 (women and men) which discriminatorily singled out women born in the 1950s for the transition stage from 60 for women (introduced in 1940) to 65 (the age for men). The CEDAWinLaw Tribunal was held on 13 July 2022, with recommendations to address this: [The Judge's Report 2022 \(cedawinlaw.com\)](#) (accessed 18 February 2024)

The four countries of the UK are subject to policy set by the UK Parliament, to varying degrees. England is exclusively governed by the UK Government, which also retains control of core funding for 'devolved' matters. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have their own parliaments (or 'assemblies'), which determine policy on areas at the heart of CEDAW. These include health, social care, early years, violence against women and aspects of social security. Scotland and NI also have distinct legal systems.

The recommendations of the SHADOW REPORT FROM THE FOUR NATIONS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM, JANUARY 2019 were that the UK and the Scottish Government should incorporate CEDAW into UK, Scots, and Northern Ireland Law and that the Welsh Government should enshrine the principles of CEDAW into legislation regarding devolved matters.

On the 12 March 2021 it was reported that the Scottish Government has said it will adopt all 30 recommendations of a National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership after a two-year review, including putting CEDAW into Scots law, after the May vote. This will have real and lasting impacts on the realisation of women's rights in Scotland. There has been a setback in the decision by the Supreme Court on Scotland's incorporation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child into Scots law¹ however, this is certainly not fatal and leaves scope for Scotland and the other devolved authorities to act.

Substantive transformative equality for all women and girls in the United Kingdom as a whole, and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales insofar as they can act. This Women's Parliament addressing violence against women and girls and the vital need for women's economic independence can advance this cause.

¹ See [REFERENCE by the Attorney General and the Advocate General for Scotland - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Bill - The Supreme Court](#) (accessed 14 January 2024).