

without doubt show that information about human rights is restricted to those who are able to exercise and enjoy them. The availability of human rights information is inversely correlated with the need for it: where needs are greatest, information is least."

In Manila, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) communications officer Dr. Teresa Habito Stuart says that after almost 50 years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was presented to the people of the world, "many for whose empowerment this Declaration was intended hardly know of its existence and are not fully aware of the moral aspiration it contains for the promotion of human dignity and democracy."

Indeed, millions of women worldwide are unaware that there are international instruments they can use for their own protection.

NUMEROUS INSTRUMENTS

There is no dearth of international instruments that protect women's human rights. If one were to count the number of United Nations instruments on the subject matter, one would say that women must be special.

In its Blue Book Series, the *UN and Human Rights 1945-95*, the United Nations said it has "always affirmed that women's rights are fundamental rights, that women should be guaranteed full participation on an equal footing in all aspects of political, civil, economic, social and cultural life and that the elimination of all forms of gender-related discrimination is one of the international community's highest priorities."

The covenants, conventions, treaties and other instruments cover almost all aspects of a woman's human rights—from the right to choose her nationality, abode, education, job, spouse and number of children to the right to enter into contracts, etc.

WHAT'S IN CEDAW FOR US?

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is considered as the international bill of rights of women. CEDAW brings together in a comprehensive treaty the provisions of existing UN instruments concerning discrimination against women.

Also called the "Women's Convention," CEDAW establishes the international standard for the promotion and protection of women's human rights. It contains 30 articles. The first five outline the general premises of eliminating discrimination and the general obligations undertaken by States ratifying the Convention. Articles 6-16 outline specific areas of rights and government obligations. The last 13 articles detail the implementation of CEDAW through the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women composed of 23 members.

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BUT HOW USEFUL ARE THEY?

It is precisely the number of instruments, as well as provisions and resolutions in other UN instruments, that point to the highest priority given to the protection of women's human rights.

Note, for example, that in 1990, the Commission on the Status of Women saw a number of "serious obstacles hindering the advancement of women and recommended steps to remove them."

Among the Commission's suggestions regarding the de jure and de facto inequality which continued to exist between men and women, is "for countries to exert efforts to make women more aware of their rights."

The suggestion came eleven

You have the right...

1. to self-determination
2. to non-discrimination
3. to the prohibition of apartheid
4. to effective remedy for violation of your rights
5. to the prohibition of retroactivity for criminal offenses
6. to the prohibition of imprisonment for indebtedness or contractual obligations
7. to procedural guarantees in criminal trials
8. to life
9. to physical and moral integrity
10. to the prohibition of torture and of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
11. to the prohibition of slavery, forced labor and trafficking in persons
12. to recognition of your legal personality
13. to liberty and security
14. to the prohibition of arbitrary arrest, detention and exile
15. to freedom of movement and residence
16. to seek asylum
17. to privacy
18. to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
19. to freedom of expression
20. to freedom of peaceful assembly
21. to freedom of association
22. to marry and found a family
23. to protection as a mother and as a child
24. to a nationality
25. to work
26. to food
27. to social security
28. to enjoy the highest standards of physical and mental health
29. to education
30. to participation in cultural life

Source: Katarina Tomasevski, *Women and Human Rights*, 1993.