



# National Council of Women of Australia Inc Ltd



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Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Subject - Proposed accession to the Optional Protocol to the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women of 18 December 1979**

I write on behalf of the National Council of Women of Australia Inc Ltd to express strong support for the proposal that Australia should accede to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

National Council members across Australia have a long history of research and advocacy with regard to the factors – political, educational, economic, legal and social – which affect the equality and status of women. A fundamental objective has been to work for the adoption and ratification of UN conventions and protocols relevant to women, especially the Optional Protocol to CEDAW.

Awareness of the role to be played by the UN human rights treaty system in protecting domestic human rights has grown over the 60 years since the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with its acknowledgement of equal rights for men and women.

We recall the significant role played by Dame Ada Norris, one of the many notable NCWA leaders, in getting the UN to establish International Women's Year in 1975, in itself a significant contribution to educating people of the importance of equality between men and women as the key to a peaceful and just world.

The periodic reporting mechanism under CEDAW has had a positive effect in enabling levels of government and community to assess regularly what progress has been made toward ensuring equality between men and women.

However, as Australia has moved at State and Territory level, towards legislating for Charters of Rights, it appears that the increased emphasis on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights may be promoting neglect of the need for equality between men and women to be entrenched in Australian law.

Accession to the Optional Protocol would have significance as a demonstration of Australia's full commitment to women's human rights. The creation in this way of an additional mechanism to deal with complaints not resolved domestically, would help balance out the unfortunate neglect of CEDAW under the new Charters of Rights.

Members of the National Council of Women of Australia are pleased to have this early opportunity to express a view on the significance of accession to the Optional Protocol to CEDAW.

