

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UN CONVENTION ON WOMEN (CEDAW) IN SRI LANKA: A COUNTRY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Protection of women's rights in a country, as in the case of all human rights, is today assessed in relation to international human rights obligations of the State. This article examines why sharp contradictions persist in the lives of Sri Lankan women over three decades after Sri Lanka's ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Possessed with high literacy and health indicators, Sri Lankan women nonetheless have fared poorly in key fields including in the formal labour sector and in political representation, and experience high levels of gender-based violence. The author argues that despite undertaking CEDAW obligations, even the limited reform agenda of Sri Lanka on gender justice has mainly focused on formal equality, and calls for a holistic reform agenda to achieve substantive equality for women as required by CEDAW obligations. Weak national gender machinery, it is argued, accounts for non-compliance far more than limitations inherent in a dualist legal system or a relatively conservative cultural ethos. The article argues for the establishing of an independent national oversight mechanism functioning within a CEDAW compliant normative framework to effectively realize gender justice. It also calls for the adoption of a new General Recommendation on national machinery by the CEDAW Committee to improve national compliance.

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