

CEDAW Elections: An Introductory Guide



The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Demystifying the election process of the CEDAW Committee and finding ways to meaningfully engage civic voices in this process is part of IWRAW Asia Pacific's efforts to ensure that CEDAW continues to advance the rights of all women everywhere.

Membership of the CEDAW Committee

The CEDAW Committee consists of 23 members who each serve four-year terms, and every two years half of these positions are up for re-election.

Members are elected at a Meeting of States Parties convened biennially in New York in June and the deadline for nominations tends to be a few months prior.

Nominations are made by States in accordance with the [Addis Abeba guidelines](#), which require treaty body members to serve in their personal capacity and to be independent and impartial. In addition, nominations are restricted to one person per nationality.

Once elected, new members take office in January of the following year.

Qualifications and Selection Criteria

CEDAW Committee candidates require thematic expertise of the fields covered by the Convention. Consideration is also given to equitable geographical participation (although there is no formal quota for any regional group), and representation of marginalised groups.

[View the CVs of current members of the Committee.](#)

Nominations by States

To nominate someone, States are required to submit a name and a biographical [data form](#) to the CEDAW Secretariat (cedaw@ohchr.org), with copy to Mr. Jakob Schneider (jschneider@ohchr.org).

Late Nominations

Whilst delegates should make every effort to respect the deadline for nominations, the established practice is that the meeting of States Parties will be asked to endorse the nomination of candidates received after the deadline at the start of the meeting and, if there is agreement, their names will be included on the ballot paper.

In addition, in cases of a late nomination the OHCHR Secretariat cannot guarantee that the candidate's details can be processed, translated and made available to all States parties before the date of the election. Such nominees are therefore at a considerable disadvantage over other candidates in promoting their candidacy and winning support from other States parties.

Responsibilities and Entitlements

[View the requirements, responsibilities and entitlements of CEDAW Committee Members.](#)

Why Should NGOs Take Action?

While treaty body elections are largely a State-run process, there is still a need for women's groups and women's rights advocates to continue advocating for the inclusion of independent feminist experts on the CEDAW Committee. The CEDAW Convention is the only UN human rights treaty that focuses on women's rights. It is important that the 23 experts of the CEDAW Committee have an understanding of the realities of women's lives, are of high moral standing and have competence in the field of women's human rights, as required by the Convention.

Thus, each CEDAW Committee member can make a difference for women's rights at many levels, including:

- upholding the notion that States are accountable to women;
- continuously expanding and furthering rights contained in the CEDAW Convention along feminist principles; and
- ensuring that NGOs are included in CEDAW-related processes.

What can NGOs do?

1. Identify a national women's rights champion who you would like to nominate.

This should be a feminist expert with a strong understanding of and experience in promoting and protecting women's rights, and who is willing and able to be a Committee member. In considering who to nominate, assess the expertise of the current composition of the CEDAW Committee and identify champions who have expertise on under-represented or under-addressed women's rights issues.

2. Build up her candidacy nationally.

National-level advocacy is critical, as nominations of candidates for elections to the CEDAW Committee must be sent to the CEDAW Secretariat through the respective State party of which the candidate is a national. In most instances, this is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. National-level advocacy on this issue must be broad-based and long-term, as the processes for selection and nomination of candidates in most States are not yet transparent. [View some examples of good practices concerning nominations of experts for treaty body elections.](#)

Some suggested actions for national advocacy:

- Once a candidate has been identified, encourage her to develop and share her election platform. This could include information on her vision for the CEDAW Committee and its contributions to the progressive development of women's rights standards, her position on key issues of interest to the women's rights movement and her specific areas of expertise and interest.
- Encourage the candidate to publicise her candidacy and her platform through engaging with the media.
- Work with partners and allies in your government, including the Ministry of Women, National Human Rights Institution, and National Commission of Women or equivalent institution addressing women's issues, to raise the profile of the candidate publicly.
- Advocate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to nominate the CSO-supported/endorsed candidate. Ensure that the government is informed of and adheres to the Addis Ababa guidelines, particularly in relation to a) independence of members of human rights treaty bodies and b) concerns regarding real and perceived conflicts of interest between a State party and a member.

3. Continue international advocacy once candidates have been nominated by States.

At this point there is generally a period of three months before the election of the members takes place at the meeting of State parties in New York. In general, State parties are represented by their missions in New York at the meeting.

In the run-up to the election, NGOs can:

- disseminate a public message or open letter setting out your endorsement of a candidate. Such an endorsement should be shared with the relevant candidate, the relevant State and the New York-based missions of the State parties to the CEDAW Convention
- continue engagement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Permanent Mission in New York, Ministry of Women, National Human Rights Institution and National Commission of Women to ensure support for the candidate you have endorsed, through encouraging the relevant State authorities to hold informal briefings publicising the candidature and election platform of the nominee
- connect with other women's rights NGOs working at the national, regional and international levels to coordinate efforts to advocate with respective governments and permanent missions as well as to develop ideas for media campaigns.

4. Additional considerations for advocacy:

- Ensure fairness in representation of Committee members (per the Addis Ababa guidelines) by campaigning for candidacies from States which have not yet had an elected candidate.
- If you have evidence of a candidate within your regional bloc who does not represent the principles embedded in the CEDAW Convention, you should raise questions with your country's mission about the nominee.
- NGOs also have the power to hold states accountable to their obligations for a fair nomination process by reporting on the national process for nomination of human rights treaty body members within their shadow reports when reporting under Articles 7 and 8 of the CEDAW Convention.

2020 Elections

The next 11 CEDAW Committee members will be elected at a Meeting of States Parties convened in New York in September 2020 (postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic). The deadline for nominations for the upcoming elections was 6 March 2020 and new members will be taking office on 1 January 2021.

This table outlines current and prospective regional representation on the CEDAW Committee:

Region	Members Remaining post-2020	Outgoing Members in 2020	Outgoing Members Seeking Re-Election	New Candidates Seeking Election
African Group	4	3	3	2 (+ 1*)
Asia and the Pacific Group	2	4	3	3
Latin America and Caribbean Group (GRULAC)	2	1	1	1 (+ 1*)
Eastern European Group (EEG)	3	1	1	(1*)
Western European and Other States Group (WEOG)	1	2	1	2

*Late nomination.

[View the list of candidates](#), with links to their biographical data.

The CEDAW Committee members whose terms are expiring are as follows:

Name	Country	Region	Term	Seeking Re-Election
Ms Nicole Ameline	France	WEOG	3 rd	Yes
Mr Gunnar Bergby	Norway	WEOG	1 st	No
Ms Marion Bethel	Bahamas	GRULAC	1 st	Yes
Ms Esther Eghobamien-Msheila	Nigeria	Africa	1 st	Yes
Ms Hilary Gbedemah	Ghana	Africa	2 nd	Yes
Ms Nahla Haidar	Lebanon	Asia Pacific	2 nd	Yes
Ms Dalia Leinarte	Lithuania	EEG	2 nd	Yes
Ms Rosario G. Manolo	Philippines	Asia Pacific	3 rd	Yes
Ms Bandana Rana	Nepal	Asia Pacific	1 st	Yes
Ms Wenyan Song	China	Asia Pacific	1 st	No
Ms Aicha Vall Verges	Mauritania	Africa	1 st	Yes

We are here for you!

As a feminist, Global South organisation, we recognise the time and resource constraints placed upon women's rights organisations the world over which can obstruct meaningful engagement with these international processes. Accordingly, we offer our continuing support to those NGOs who seek to understand and engage with these processes. Please write to us (iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org) for more information, with subject line: CEDAW Elections 2020. Please also keep us informed if you are campaigning for a candidate from your country.