

FOREWORD

The principle of equality and non-discrimination are essential principles for the promotion of women's rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines the rights of women to be free from discrimination and sets the core principles to ensure women have equal access and equal opportunities in public and private life. It establishes an agenda for national action to address the persistent nature of inequality and discrimination, to provide a basis for achieving equality and freedom in the public and private sphere, both directly and indirectly, intentionally and unintentionally, and to provide a theoretical framework by which to identify barriers to women's advancement, assess needs, set goals, and to identify measures to be taken for action.

The CEDAW Convention is a human rights treaty. It carries with it the strength and obligation that are legally binding on states while also establishing a monitoring mechanism for individual State Parties as well as the possibility for individuals around the world to lodge a complaint to the CEDAW Committee. While progress has been made in many countries, there is no denial that human rights violations exist in all countries and cultures to varying degrees; disparities in well-being, status, rights and power between men and women continue to persist. Custom and culture often override considerations of state obligations under CEDAW, and to maintain such balance, there is a need to create, maintain, and reinforce social relations between women and men as an element of group identity.

This paper enshrines the concept of equality through CEDAW to provide a resource for the ASEAN Intergovernmental Human Rights Commission (AICHR) in its engagement with the ASEAN governments using international standards in promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girl children. With the exception of Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore who have no reservation to the substantive articles of CEDAW, most of the ASEAN countries have ratified CEDAW and have undertaken binding obligations to promote and protect the human rights of women according CEDAW standards. AICHR remains to be the main mechanism for the promotion and protection of the human rights of all people, with women included in ASEAN. It needs to continually develop its capability in using the standards of CEDAW for equality and non-discrimination when carrying out its mandate. The UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific would like to gratefully acknowledge the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) for their continued generous support and their leadership through the Regional Programme on Improving Women's Human Rights in South East Asia.

The author traces back into the awakening history and the universal recognition of basic rights, without any distinction between the needs and experiences of women comparing to men. It further elaborates on the concept of equality and non-discrimination as enshrined in CEDAW, the application of CEDAW