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My name is Soon-Young Yoon, representing the Women's Environment and Development Organization. Whenever we prepare for UN negotiations on a document, I go into a state of high anxiety. Will our debates here result in a UN document that will gather dust in the archives—or can we bring it to life?

WEDO believes that Habitat III offers the feminist and women's movements—involving men and women alike—an historic opportunity to bring the New Urban Agenda to life. The concept is simple: If we can weave women's human rights into the 17 SDG goals in an urban sustainable development agenda, we can change the course of development for generations to come.

How can this happen? The good news is that we are already on our way with a Cities for CEDAW campaign. CEDAW refers to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified by 189 countries. The short-term goal is to “make the global --local” by promoting the adoption of CEDAW as a municipal ordinance in cities large and small. The long-term goal is to ensure that CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action are fully integrated into the New Urban Agenda, 2030 sustainable development agenda and implementation of the Paris Accord.

We know it works. Inspired by the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, in 1998 San Francisco became the first municipality in the world to adopt a local ordinance reflecting the principles of CEDAW. This was the first time in UN history that a human rights treaty was adopted as law at a local level. There was a major shift in how the city was managed such as a greater gender balance in hiring in public works and transport, fire and police departments. It changed how the city measured the impact of its programs, improving street lights to make the city safer for women and girls at night. CEDAW is also being used to justify flexible hours and to end racial discrimination against women workers.

Between 1998 and 2013, other cities — including Los Angeles and Berkeley, as well as the State of Hawaii —enacted similar initiatives. So far, the campaign has engaged more than 50 cities and counties across the U.S., earned commitments to CEDAW from more than 200 mayors, and brought “Cities for CEDAW” to the UN's attention at last year's Commission on the Status of Women meeting.

The point I want to emphasize is this: It is not enough to express the need for gender equality—we must also use the full weight of UN global consensus documents on gender equality and women's empowerment.

This March, the Cities for CEDAW campaign opened its international doors. So far, Port of Spain, Reykjavik among other cities have expressed their interest! We call on governments and all stakeholders to make sure that the New Urban Agenda includes CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action in the text. With a renewed women's human rights movement in cities, we can achieve the City We Need.