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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Northampton MA: Do the citizens of the US believe that women – all women – deserve universal human rights? In this country, we have been able to enact a legal framework that has served to not only open doors, but to raise our national consciousness. But what about the rest of the world? If women anywhere are oppressed, are legally powerless, are seen as objects that can be “trafficked,” have we in this country really achieved lasting goals?

These are questions that will be addressed at a public forum in Northampton at 7:00 p.m. on March 31<sup>st</sup>, at the Unitarian Society (next to City Hall). The program was initiated and organized by the Zonta Club of Northampton Area, and is co-sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Society’s Peace and Justice Committee and the Women’s Fund of Western Mass.

The specific focus of the evening will be “CEDAW” – the United Nations Convention to Eradicate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women – originally drafted in 1979 with the United States as a signatory, but which has yet to be ratified by the US Senate. By now, most of the UN member countries have pledged to abide by its precepts except a handful of countries, which include Micronesia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran – and the United States of America.

“It is our hope that many people can not only attend this meeting, but also learn something about CEDAW and why it is important,” said Lynn Goodhue, Area Director for Zonta and past president of the local club. “We are contacting local high school teachers and college professors, and providing educational materials to them. We hope that this can be incorporated into class assignments, and that a lot of productive discussion will be provoked by this event.”

If the consensus of the evening favors CEDAW ratification, Zonta members hope to convey that determination to Washington decision makers. A resolution will be presented for signature by all the attendees, and an advocacy table will be available at the meeting.

“Zonta International has focused on CEDAW as critical to our overall mission, to ‘improve the status of women worldwide,’ said Judith Luddy, also past president of the local club and member of the UN committee. “ Zonta International, led by our president Margit Webjorn of Sweden, has challenged all the nations of the world to halt the sexual trafficking of women and children, which is now far more lucrative than the illegal drug trade. If the United States can’t find a way to ratify this treaty, then we are really abdicating our leadership in human rights internationally. Our domestic laws go far beyond the basic precepts of CEDAW, so national sovereignty is not in jeopardy. What in the world is stopping us from ratifying?”

Speakers for the evening include:

Dr. Gregory S. Prince, Jr., president of Hampshire College, long recognized as a dynamic supporter of the United Nations;

Dr. Janice Raymond, UMass Professor Emerita of Women’s Studies, now a worldwide speaker and activist as co-executive director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women;

Dr. Laura H. Roskos, visiting scholar at Suffolk University and coordinator of the Massachusetts CEDAW Initiative Center for Women’s Health and Human Rights;

Dr. Connie Chow from Simmons College, of the Women’s Rights Program Steering Committee of Amnesty International and coordinator of the Massachusetts CEDAW project;

Betty Jane Bourdon, area businesswoman, currently Vice President of Zonta International and a candidate for International President.

Mayor Mary Clare Higgins, who serves on the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, will give a welcome from the City of Northampton. State Representative Ellen Story, who has been

instrumental in presenting a resolution to the Great and General Court of Massachusetts advocating support of CEDAW, will bring greetings.

For further information, please contact 413-268-9241, or the Northampton Zonta website at [www.zontadistrict1.org/northampton\\_ma](http://www.zontadistrict1.org/northampton_ma)