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## Women's rights

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Each year, more than four million women and girls are sold into sexual slavery. Only days ago in Pakistan, the family of two murder victims accepted eight young girls as reparation from the convicted murderers' family. These girls, ranging in age from 5 to 15, were to be married to men the age of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers. Fortunately, Pakistani officials intervened and rescued the girls just before the wedding vows were consummated.

Human freedom and fundamental rights must extend to women of all ages. The safety of society and progress of humanity depend upon it. The importance of women's rights has been recognized and supported by the United Nations in an international bill of rights for women known as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women). Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, this pact commits countries to ban arranged marriages and discrimination against women in employment, education, and legal rights. Perhaps it was Pakistan's participation in this treaty that influenced official intervention.

While 170 nations have ratified CEDAW, the US and Afghanistan have not. Both countries signed the treaty in 1980. But some groups holding strong opinions have opposed ratification. Approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last week, the treaty may come to the Senate floor this fall.

Regardless of the treaty, the protection of the freedom and rights for half the world's population deserves the support of every citizen of the world.

During the fight for human rights in 19th-century United States, Maria Weston Chapman implored in a speech to the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, "Let us rise in the moral power of womanhood; and give utterance

to the voice of outraged mercy, and insulted justice, and eternal truth, and mighty love and holy freedom."

This clarion call rings true. Outrage at injustice should move us to an active defense of women's rights around the globe. These compelling words hint at a higher authority for human rights. It's actually one's divine right to equality and freedom that we are defending.

Another 19th-century freedom fighter, Mary Baker Eddy, wrote in a poem entitled "Women's Rights":

The right to worship deep and pure,  
To bless the orphan, feed the poor;  
Last at the cross to mourn her Lord,  
First at the tomb to hear his word ....  
In short, the right to work and pray,  
'To point to heaven and lead the way'

("Miscellaneous Writings, 1883-1896," pgs. 388,389).

Citing the worthiness of woman through faithful service to Jesus, Mrs. Eddy invoked divine authority for women's equality. Surely in this century humanity can unite in recognizing every woman's right to worship and even lead worship services equally with men. We can support a woman's right to feed the poor (including herself) and to have equal access to food and the production of it. We can allow a woman's right to work and receive equal compensation. We can insist on woman's divine right to pray for health and healing and to lead herself, her family, and others to receive the spiritual blessings that God provides.

Mrs. Eddy founded her Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, on just such foundations. Her premise was that God created man and woman equal in quality, as noted in Genesis: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (1:27).

Holding this creation as the divine standard for human action, she urged men and women to act on equality as a divine demand, achievable here and now. So men and women were afforded equal rights in her Church.

She urged the defense of women's rights far beyond the walls of the church: "In natural law and in religion the right of woman to fill the highest measure of enlightened understanding and the highest places in government, is inalienable, and these rights are ably vindicated by the noblest of both sexes. This is woman's hour, with all its sweet amenities and its moral and religious reforms" ("No and Yes," pg. 45).

This is woman's hour around the world, and every woman must share in it. Every woman is worthy to be respected, educated, and safe from exploitation. It is our responsibility and right to pray, promote, and protect the human and divine rights of all. The world's stability and prosperity depend on it.