



History of the LWV and the UN reprinted from Impact on Issues 2018-2020

At the first League Convention in 1920, delegates called for “adhesion of the United States to the League of Nations with least possible delay,” in recognition of the need for a mechanism to facilitate settlement of international disputes.

When the issue of U.S. participation in the League of Nations turned into a bitter partisan battle, active League support did not materialize until 1932.

During World War II, the League, conscious of its earlier hesitancy, began to study “U.S. participation in the making and execution of plans for worldwide reconstruction and for a postwar organization for peace to eventually include all peoples, regardless of race, religion, or political persuasion.” In 1944, the League supported “U.S. membership in an international organization for the peaceful settlement of disputes, with the machinery to handle economic, social, and political problems.”

Even before the United Nations was formally established, the League launched an unprecedented nationwide campaign to help build public understanding of the *Dumbarton Oaks and Bretton Woods agreements* to establish the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. The League trained more than 5,000 speakers and distributed more than a million brochures during a six-month period. At the UN Charter Conference in 1945, the League was one of 42 nongovernmental organizations invited by President Truman to serve as consultants to the U.S. delegation. Since then, the League has maintained a presence at the United Nations through its UN Observers; working with UN agencies, member states, and other NGOs to advance LWVUS positions; and by periodically hosting League Day at the UN for League members.

The UN position evolved through continued study. By 1948, the League called for strengthening the United Nations and its specialized agencies through increased use, adequate financial contributions, and improved procedures. It also supported the UN’s peacekeeping functions. In 1962, the League evaluated “means of strengthening the UN under present conditions,” most notably heightened antagonisms between the United States and the Soviet Union.

In 1976, the League reexamined the UN system “with emphasis on relations between developed and developing countries and their implications for U.S. policy.” Members studied how world issues had changed alignments at the United Nations from a primarily East-West to an increasingly rich-nation/poor-nation focus and its effect on U.S. participation in the UN system. The result was a

resounding reaffirmation of support for a strengthened UN system and agreement that the United States should work constructively within the UN to further our foreign policy goals.

The League consistently monitors U.S. actions at the UN, engaging in programs at the U.S. Mission, and providing support for mutually held policies. The League continues to urge adequate funding for the UN, both by regular assessments and voluntary contributions, full payment of U.S. financial obligations to the UN, and full U.S. participation in the UN system.

In addition to supporting increased use and strength of the UN peacekeeping machinery, under the UN position in support of “continuing efforts to reduce the risk of war,” the League has lobbied for Senate ratification of certain disarmament measures, notably the UN-negotiated nuclear nonproliferation treaty. Leagues’ efforts in their communities to develop public understanding and awareness of UN accomplishments, limitations, and potential took on special significance in 1995 when the League celebrated its 75th anniversary and the United Nations its 50th.

In 1995, the League participated in the UN 4th *World Conference on Women* and the *NGO Forum on Women* in Beijing, China, sponsoring workshops on “Organizing Candidate Debates” and “Making Democracy Work®: Strategies for Grassroots Organization, Education, and Advocacy.” This was followed in 1999 with a League co-sponsored regional conference of the President’s Interagency Council on Women, *Women 2000: Beijing Plus Five*, to prepare for the Special Session of the General Assembly, *Women 2000, Gender Equality, Development, and Peace for the Twenty-First Century*, which LWVUS UN Observers were accredited to attend in 2000.

In 1997, the League was granted Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which provides the opportunity to make interventions on issues the League supports. We joined other NGOs in submitting an official statement on behalf of the Girl Child that was presented at the UN Commission on the Status of Women meeting in March 2000. As a result of interventions, the League has successfully launched and supported the *Working Group on Girls (WGG)*, a coalition of 80+ NGOs dedicated to focusing governments on the plight of girls throughout the world. The *International Day of the Girl* is also celebrated around the world as a result of League and WGG efforts. Women in Saudi Arabia enjoy the right to vote after the League provided an intervention that linked women’s enfranchisement with GDP.

League activity on women and girl-related issues continued in the 2000s. In 2002, LWVUS submitted testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in support of Senate ratification of the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The League joined other NGOs in official statements to the *UN Commission on the Status of Women*: advocating protection of girls’ rights in a lifecycle approach to gender issues in 2004; emphasizing that financing for girls’ equality and for the empowerment of girls is a basic and sound strategy for the implementation of all human rights in 2008. The League also joined the United Nation’s Campaign *UNITE to End Violence against Women, 2008-2015*, whose overall objective is raising public awareness and increasing political will and resources for preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls

worldwide. In 2011, as the move to ratify CEDAW continued, LWVUS submitted testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee on Civil and Constitutional Rights.

Since then, the League, in coordination with WGG, developed a comprehensive strategy to prevent sexual human trafficking at major events. This strategy was adopted by the Special Representative to the UN Secretary General to Prevent Violence Against Children in her work with member states on preventing violence. Additionally, it was adopted by Brazil and implemented at its 2014 World Cup and Mardi Gras, as well as by the New Jersey Attorney General for the 2014 Super Bowl. The United States has included components of the strategy in its 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report.

In June 2014, the League formally adopted a position opposing human trafficking. As a result of that position, the LWVUS UN Observers are focusing efforts in the areas of demand and labor trafficking.

In 2002, the League urged President George W. Bush to work with the UN to develop clear policy goals and actions regarding the U.S.'s possible intervention in Iraq. On initiation of combat operations, the League's Board issued a statement saying that continued diplomatic efforts through the UN would have better served international unity, and military force should have been used as a tool of last resort.

Leagues nationwide work to realize the United Nations' *Millennium Goals* outlined by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at the September 2000 Millennium Summit and adopted by 191 states. In 2005, the League urged the Administration to support the goals of the UN's *2005 World Summit Outcome Document*, an historic effort to end global poverty, promote peace, and strengthen the UN, and urged Congress to reject the *United Nations Reform Act*.

In 2015, League members had the opportunity to directly voice their opinions and witness UN conferences through the use of technology. By voting on the *Goals We Want*, LWV members had an opportunity to encourage the adoption of post-2015 goals seeking to eliminate severe world poverty, encourage mandatory education for girls and boys at the primary and secondary levels and improve women's economic and political empowerment.

The UN Observer program includes less than a dozen volunteers who participate in a variety of committees and activities dealing with global issues of climate change, human trafficking, and women's economic and political empowerment.