

# Human Rights Watch

## Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/01/dispatches-us-club-1-childrens-rights>

## Campaign and Advocacy

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Today the United States officially became a club of one, as the only United Nations member country that has not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Until this year, there were three countries that hadn't ratified. But South Sudan which only gained its independence in 2011 acceded in January, and today, Somalia which for many years had no recognized government completed its ratification process. This afternoon, Somalia's prime minister deposited his country's instrument of ratification at the UN headquarters in New York.

The US is now alone.

With 197 states parties, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. It establishes the rights that every parent wants for their child: the right to an education, to health, to a name and nationality, and to freedom from violence, discrimination, and exploitation. These rights should not be controversial. Unfortunately, some groups in the US have claimed that by affirming the rights of children, ratification of the convention would undermine the rights of parents.

This simply wouldn't be the case. The convention repeatedly emphasizes the importance of parents in raising and guiding their children and specifically obliges countries to recognize the responsibilities and duties of parents.

The US signed the treaty two decades ago, in 1995, but no serious effort has been made in recent years to get the necessary approval of two-thirds of the Senate.

The main legal challenge for US ratification is that it remains the only country to sentence children to life in prison without the possibility of parole a punishment the treaty specifically prohibits. The US Supreme Court has issued several decisions in recent years that have progressively narrowed the use of this sentence against child offenders, and states should prohibit it completely. The US should ratify the treaty and declare that it is working to end the practice in the states that allow it.

Americans care for the well-being of children as much as anyone else. The White House and Congress should do what every other country in the world has now done: commit under international law to ensure that children can grow, develop, and enjoy all their rights.

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