

**Overview of the Major Accomplishments of the
Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines**

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First of all, let me thank the sponsors of the 8th Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions for the work they have done, especially the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, the National Human Rights Institution of Nepal and the Forum Secretariat. I would like to congratulate the new Chairperson of the Forum, Chairman Nayan Bahadur Khatri of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal. At the same time, I wish to extend my gratitude to the Forum's former Chairman, Dr. Justice Adarsh S. Anand, Chairman of the National Human Rights Institution of India.

After fifteen years of its existence, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, an independent body created under the Philippine Constitution fulfilling the requirements of the Paris Principles, is about to fully complete the revision of its organizational structure, processes and programs and priorities. Hence, offices are grouped to better accomplish its work on human rights protection, promotion, partnership building, capacity building, and strategic planning.

In the Protection of Human Rights

By its broad mandate under the Constitution, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines played a crucial role in the passage of specific human rights legislations. One of which is the new law under Republic Act No. 9208, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003, an important legislation focusing on the issue of trafficking in women and children. Another specific legislation already passed in the two (2) Houses of Congress and submitted to the President for signature focuses on a strong reparative mechanism for women/children victims is the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children bill.

Moreover, the Philippine Commission is greatly involved with recent judicial pronouncement on the re-imposition of the death penalty. Just recently, the Commission submitted its position paper to the Supreme Court of the Philippines against the execution of two (2) convicted prisoners scheduled in the last week of January 2004 for being unconstitutional. The Court has already authorized the stay of the execution, yet the law for the re-imposition of the death penalty is still in effect. This is one area where the Philippine Commission may need the expertise of the Fiji Commission because of its active court advocacy as amicus.

A landmark decision was reached in the case of a convicted woman whose penalty is death by lethal injection. In such case, the

Supreme Court upon review recognized the battered wife syndrome as a matter of self-defense resulting in her acquittal.

In the Promotion of Human Rights

Human rights promotion and education component focuses on educators, community-based units, and - because of their record of human rights violations - the military and police. This activity is also being extended to community leaders in the grassroots through our flagship program known as the Barangay Human Rights Action Center.

In the middle of the year 2003, the Commission, together with the Department of Education, launched officially the implementation of the teaching exemplars and manuals developed to introduce human rights in formal primary, intermediate and secondary levels of education. Last year also, the principals and immediate supervisors were given orientation on the modules and manuals developed. Within the first semester of this year, training of trainers has been initiated nationwide. This introduces human rights education in the academe.

The Commission works with the Judiciary to incorporate human rights norms in its judicial reform program. We educate judges on human rights through the Supreme Court's Philippine Judicial Academy, with support from U.N. agencies such as the UNICEF.

The Supreme Court of the Philippines recognized that children's rights must be given special protection. Thus, the Court adopted new

specific rules to make all courts and court procedures more children sensitive.

Some of the measures adopted for this purpose are the following rules:

- Rule on Examination of a Child Witness
- Rule on Commitment of Children
- Rule on Juveniles in Conflict with the Law

Under the Partnership Building

Partnership building has a wide-range of activities including the protection and promotion of human rights at the national and international level.

The Commission finds support from the Government of the Philippines to a fully functioning National Human Rights Institution.

Through the National Economic and Development Authority, the Government entered into a Country Cooperation Agreement with the United Nations Development Programme. In one of its portfolios, the Commission has been tasked as Executing Agency of the Right to Development. Thus, reforms have been institutionalized to prioritize economic, cultural and social rights, and issues on good governance. This new role of the Commission is envisioned to bring to reality the concept of the rights-based approach to development. Through our initiative, the government-UNDP Cooperation Programme has adopted the rights-based

approach. The Commission leads the capacity building of government and non-government organizations to mainstream human rights and gender concerns, in governance and development processes.

May this year is the election of the Philippine President, Vice-President, Senators and other local government officials. In cooperation with the Committee on Civil, Political and Human Rights of the House of Representatives, the Commission launched a forum on the right to suffrage. This will be followed by domestic election-watch activities nationwide to be headed by the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines.

At the international level, the Philippine Commission has been involved in the following partnership building activities:

- The Commission received two (2) officials from the National Human Rights Commission of South Korea in a staff exchange program.
- An official from the Ombudsman of Vanuatu came to the Commission under an internship program.
- The Commission sponsored a short orientation for the Chairperson and the Commissioners and other officials of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal.
- Another orientation about the formulation of National Human Rights Action Plan was conducted for the officials of the Government of Nepal.

- The Chairperson of the Philippine Commission was invited by the SUHAKAM during the celebration of its anniversary in Malaysia to speak on Human Rights and the Administration of Law.
- Another cooperation with the SUHAKAM was about the mass deportation of Filipinos without working/travel papers in Sabah.
- The Philippine Commission also received the observers from different countries on the Peace Process.

As it may be observed, the different national institutions presented brief overview of their accomplishments. In closing, the Philippine Commission would like to suggest that the Forum should also tackle problems encountered by national institutions in the pursuit of their respective mandates. With that in mind, I wish to thank you all.