

Human Rights in the Philippines: Ideal and Realities

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36 ATENEO L.J. 113 (1992).

*SUBJECT(S): INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW,
CONSTITUTIONAL LAW*

KEYWORD(S): HUMAN RIGHTS, BILL OF RIGHTS

Defining human rights has been a persistent difficulty throughout the ages. While it is true that there had been unanimous assent and recognition of the subject matter, it was only in the 20th century that an enumeration of human rights was embodied in an international document, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The person most responsible for its drafting, Rene Cassin, was a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

In addition to the UDHR, the United Nations General Assembly also adopted and ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Optional Protocol).

As a democratic country, it becomes imperative for the Philippines to question the nature of its government and citizen's involvement in the protection of these inalienable rights. Of course, the 1987 Constitution, through the Bill of Rights, mandates respect for human rights. The Supreme Court, in interpreting this mandate throughout the years, had rendered decisions which may have either strengthened or undermined the protection of human rights. Thus, circumspection on the part of the government and vigilance on the part of the citizenry becomes necessary.