

Human Rights: My Reflection

Melchor B. Brillantes

Faculty

School of Allied Medicine

Universidad de Zamboanga

Zamboanga City, Philippines

Human Rights the essence of an authentic man.... a principle to be practiced regardless.... a dignity to be respected and a process leading to perfection.

I am currently teaching Philosophy of Man in the School of Allied Medicine. Handling the subjects for almost five years now has given me an opportunity to reflect on some questions that concerns man. Whatever thoughts and ideas I will be sharing in this paper are not my own but from the great thinkers who contemplated man in the context of his society. Whenever I opened a philosophy books a lot of good ideas were presented by some notable philosophers who in one way or another founded the kind of society as we know it today. Philosophers since Socrates fought vigorously against all systems that debase human dignity such as the social and political system. Sometimes it is the system that sets the limits of the recognition of human rights. Culture, for example sometimes contradicts with the principle of human rights like the in case of how each country practice death penalty. Some culture stoning is acceptable practice like in the case of Mosaic Law. However, this does not mean that they should not recognize human rights. In some countries that are under military rule, for example the freedom of expression is deprived. Again, the extend of exercise of human rights has something to do with the kind of political system each country adopted. As long as there is something with the system, there will some few good men who make a stand for it, fight for it and die for it.

Existentialism, for example is a philosophical reaction that emerged during The Industrial Revolution where workers experience exploitation and injustices of the emerging system of capitalism. Marx and Engels for example, rallied this cause hoping to have a better transformation of society where all men have equal access to resources for self-fulfillment that eventually led to the birth of communism. Communism as we all know gained wide acceptance especially in Russia. For how many years, communism penetrated countries who sought to bring about equality. But even then, this form of government cannot free itself from the challenge that shook its foundation and eventually lost its influence. The rise of feminism movement that seeks to create equal opportunity for women in the society is another example that Philosophers and human advocates struggled to establish the principle and extend of its application as a continuous process geared toward perfection. Countless efforts were evident for this fulfillment. The challenge is set forth to educate man, to make more fully human.

Recently, the Universidad de Zamboanga – Community Extension Services in partnership with, Amnesty International conducted an Orientation Seminar on Human Rights Education. Universidad de Zamboanga is one of the Centers for Human Rights Education in Region IX and as an academic institution, selected faculty members were sent to attend the said seminar that will eventually become the facilitators of the trainings that the centers will be doing. I was fortunate to be one of the participants. Prior to the seminar, I was filled with some

preconceived notions of what human rights is all about especially on the philosophical idea of man. The way I understand it, is that human rights is one of the product of philosophers' quest in understanding what man is. Philosophy itself as quests for life's meaning helps shaped the concept of what it meant to be human. Philosophically, man is a being that possesses dignity which is inherent of his being. Rich ideas were considered to come up with a common understanding the activity started with mind setting wherein the facilitator asked us to think of something that would describe what is man is all about. Varied ideas were drawn out in that activity but then again the bottom-line it's all about human rights.

The next activity was the input given by the facilitator about the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, its background and origin, nature and content wherein different rights were enumerated and discussed accordingly. The facilitator expounded the definition and clarification of the terms, as to its characteristics, applications, and limits. Personally, the input were so enriching and challenging after knowing what human rights is and the responsibility that the individuals has in order to promote, protect and fulfill human rights. Fortunately we were invited for the advance screening of the award-winning local movie in the recent Cinemalaya Film Festival entitled "HALAW" which accounted the flight of some Filipinos to Sabah, Malaysia. From that movie, we tried to identify the different human rights violations, its causes and possible remedies. Few reasons for this phenomenon were the lack of education and the lack of job opportunities which the government failed to provide for its people and other similar cases of abuses and violations of human rights were presented for purpose of discussion.

"Education is the answer to human abuses and violations" according to our facilitator in which also believed since people who fell victims of human rights abuses and violations were somehow ignorant of their rights. And if people were educated, they will be watchful over rights and the rights of others. As we all know, knowledge as opposite of ignorance is liberating and empowering. For those who ascribed human rights, education is right. A right which the government has the great role in fulfilling such, which is to educate its people, to empower it people with the necessary knowledge to be productive citizens. To some countries, education is for free and all it citizens have equal access to quality education. In the Philippines, there is an increasing number of illiteracy especially in the rural areas. The poor and the landless were exploited in terms of their exercise of freedom and human rights. Like for example, workers or farmers of haciendas own by a few were deprived to educate their children. The minorities in the far flunk areas deprived of the government services and the continuous destruction of the environment were few of the issues that education has to address.

Philippines is a poor country with a high poverty incidence. Poverty is threat to human rights. When a country is poor, people are unmindful of their rights but to fulfill their basic needs in whatever means they could. This is a sad reality we are experiencing in our country. The film "HALAW" is a proof of this condition. The sad flight of our fellow Filipinos to other country is just one of the results of the wrong governance and evil system we are practicing. Poverty is perceived as a result of corruption especially in the government. The government whom we thought will safeguard the welfare of its people is the one responsible of some evil acts and the suffering of its people. But more than that is becoming a culture. As a result, many were displaced and are deprived of the opportunity to enjoy good life, free from economic wants and needs. We cannot stop Filipinos to go out to other countries to find good opportunities.

Recently, we had national our election. We chose leaders whom we thought capable to bring about change. We need a concrete remedy from our government, if this government is concerned with its citizens. Some would say that it is difficult to eradicate corruption but I admire the efforts of those who are sincere in fighting against it and this is what we hope for this government. Militant groups are watchful how this government responds to the urgent needs of its citizens. To liberate the Filipinos from the bondage of poverty and in this way respect for human rights will be a reality.

If we can educate the people of their rights, they will be watchful over their rights and respect the rights of other just in the lyrics of the song "Imagine" by The Beatles....maybe we can have a perfect society.