



Milestones

Magna Carta of Women adopted in Philippines

On 14 August 2009, the President of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, signed into law Republic Act 9710—the Magna Carta of Women. The Act is a comprehensive women's human rights law that seeks to eliminate discrimination against women by recognizing, protecting, fulfilling and promoting the rights of Filipino women, especially those in the marginalized sectors.

The Act is based on a substantive notion of gender equality and aims at real empowerment of women. It guarantees all rights of women enshrined in the Philippines Constitution and those rights recognized under international instruments signed and ratified by the Philippines, which are in consonance with Philippine laws. The Act spells out every woman's right to, *inter alia*: protection from all forms of violence, including those committed by the State; protection and security in times of disaster, calamities and other crisis situations; participation and representation; equal treatment before the law; and comprehensive health services and health information and education.

It also guarantees the civil, political and economic rights of women in the marginalized sectors, in particular their right to: food security and resources for food production, including equal rights in the titling of land; localized, accessible, secure and affordable housing; employment, livelihood, credit, capital and technology; skills training, and scholarships; representation and participation in policy-making or decision-making bodies in the regional, national, and international levels; access to information regarding policies on women; social protection; and recognition and preservation of cultural identity and integrity, provided that these cultural systems and practices are not discriminatory to women.

The Act defines marginalized sectors as those who belong to the basic, disadvantaged or vulnerable

groups, who are mostly living in poverty and have little or no access to land and other resources, basic social and economic services such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation, employment and livelihood opportunities, housing security and the justice system. It recognizes that women fisherfolk—women engaged in fishing in municipal waters, coastal and marine areas, women workers in commercial fishing and aquaculture, vendors and processors of fish and coastal products, and subsistence producers such as shell-gatherers, managers and producers of mangrove resources—are among such marginalized groups.

The Act stresses that the State shall promote equal access to the use and management of fisheries and aquatic resources, and all the rights and benefits accruing to stakeholders in the fishing industry. It shall also ensure that equal status is given to women and men, and to women's organizations, in the issuance of stewardship or lease agreements and other fishery rights that may be granted for the use and management of coastal and aquatic resources. Further, that the State shall endeavour to provide opportunities for empowering women fishers to be involved in the control and management, not only of the catch and production of aquamarine resources, but also to engage in entrepreneurial activities that will add value to production and marketing ventures.

Most importantly, the Magna Carta asks the State to ensure women's participation in policy-making or decision-making bodies in the regional, national and international levels, including the participation of grassroots women leaders in bodies such as the National Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council (NFARMC).

The complete text of the Magna Carta of Women can be accessed at: <http://www.ncrfw.gov.ph/index.php/magna-carta-of-women>.