

The Enduring Challenge to Human Rights Education: Reflections from the Field in the “New Normal”^{1*}

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WHEN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR) was adopted almost seventy-five years ago, its framers understood the tremendous power of human rights education. The UDHR has a powerful statement about human rights education in its preamble. As a common standard of achievement for all peoples and states, it implored “every individual and every organ of society” to “strive by teaching and education to promote respect for [human] rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international.”¹ Article 26 of the UDHR also posits that education should be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights.² When people are educated and know their fundamental rights and freedoms, they tap into entitlements that pertain to them as human beings. Education unlocks rights and provides people opportunities to become meaningful holders of rights and to exercise them. State agents, on the other hand, as bearers of human rights obligations, are called out to abide by human rights obligations. Education on human rights, even for a short period of time, improves knowledge, positive attitudes, and commitment.³

In recent years, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has surfaced many human rights issues—the imposition of restrictions and limitations on rights and freedoms, the enjoyment of the right to health, as well as other systematic issues—and exposed the vulnerabilities of certain groups to human rights violations, including women and persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, children, the poor, and indigenous peoples. The right to “human rights education” or “training, dissemination, and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the moulding of attitudes”⁴ was one such right that the COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted. While human rights education is a continuous learning process with dimensions of knowledge and skills, values and at-

titudes, and behavior and action,⁵ it became more arduous, and in certain cases, unavailable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a watershed moment. Although as a movement, human rights education dates back to at least the 1970s,⁶ the “new normal” that the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in became an awakening. The means and methods to educate people about, through, and for human rights⁷ indeed demand changes and flexibility, and need to be effective as times and circumstances change. When people have had to adjust to new norms, including health protocols and reduced mobility, once commonplace face-to-face interactions—the usual way of conducting human rights education—shifted to virtual environments. Adapting to these changes, human rights learning and teaching had to be online also, with the rise of tools like virtual classrooms and online learning management systems. Blended, hybrid, or hyflex learning was deployed. Yet changes to the means and methods of human rights education did not happen uniformly in the world; and in different countries, human rights education does not exist in all places where it should.

Despite restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic having been lifted in many places, there is no indication that the world would go back to how it was. The “new normal” changed people’s lives, and along with it, provoked a re-imagination and co-creation of human rights education. I reflect on that as a challenge to human rights education in this article and use the example of the Philippines as a case for reflection. The “new normal” resulted in relatively new challenges to human rights education. It also exposed the enduring limiting challenge to human rights education, one which all human rights educators have to confront head on and deal with if human rights education were to live up to its full potential of empowering people through the education of rights.

“New Normal” Challenges to the Right to Human Rights Education

Some people were unable to continue with their education because they lacked access to the internet, digital equipment, or other tools and resources to cope with the changes, despite the widespread perception that online courses were beneficial and easy.⁸ COVID-19 infection outbreaks affecting human rights educators and learners and health protocols halted certain

educational programs. All of these and more were the hallmark effects of the "new normal."

This situation threatened and still threatens the realization of everyone's basic rights, the rights of disadvantaged, marginalized, and vulnerable groups, and of course, the right to human rights education. States were also in between the twilights of coping with the demands of human rights education as a right amidst a framework of human rights education that grapples with change and continuity because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The "new normal" presented and continues to present challenges to the right to human rights education at two levels. One deals with the content or substance of human rights education; the other on pedagogy or means and methods of the delivery of human rights education. It is easy to overlook the significance of the subject matter (substance or content) while considering the difficulties associated with undertaking human rights education, yet it is just as significant. Substance may be compromised, rendered meaningless, if the pedagogical implements of education were ineffectual or simply lacking.

The first is the *substance challenge* to human rights education. Human rights education has to be relevant to the human condition and contextualized at the personal level. The right to health, an economic, social, and cultural right, took prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Where people's right to health has been imperiled, human rights education has to respond with interventions that address the right to health. Where other rights associated with quarantine restrictions and lockdowns have been affected, so too must human rights education address them. This is aside from the tried and tested content of human rights education highlighting empathy and intersectionality.

The second level is the *pedagogical challenge* to human rights education. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, amidst heavy and strict lockdowns, the provision of education on human rights was more difficult. The traditional mode of the provision of human rights education through face-to-face interactions was rendered impractical and unsafe. It was a challenge to ensure that human rights education efforts continued, especially since it was also at this time that human rights violations were rampant in certain settings and largely unchecked. Resort to measures of human rights education that may depart from face-to-face interactions became necessary.

Rising to the “New Normal” Challenges

Foundations and Model of Human Rights Education in the Philippines

The Philippines presents an interesting case study for human rights education especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is one of the few countries in the world that has a constitutional mandate on human rights education. The 1987 Philippine Constitution mandates the Commission of Human Rights (Commission) to establish “a continuing program of research, education, and information to enhance respect for the primacy of human rights”⁹ and encourages all educational institutions to include “respect for human rights” in the curriculums.¹⁰ Several laws require the government to undertake human rights education activities.¹¹ The Anti-Torture Act of 2009, for example, require authorities to “ensure that education and information regarding prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment shall be fully included in the training of law enforcement personnel, civil or military, medical personnel, public officials and other persons who may be involved in the custody, interrogation or treatment of any individual subjected to any form of arrest, detention or imprisonment.”¹² The Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education should also “ensure the integration of human rights education courses in all primary, secondary and tertiary level academic institutions nationwide.”¹³ The Good Manners and Right Conduct (GMRC) and Values Education law requires Values Education to be an integral and essential part of the K to 12 basic education curriculum.¹⁴ Values Education should “encompass universal human, ethical, and moral values, among others”¹⁵ and should emphasize human dignity.¹⁶

Regulations complement the legal framework, e.g., Executive Order No. 27, series of 1987, was issued for education that “maximizes” respect for human rights and became the basis for an earlier order to include the study of human rights and accompanying responsibilities in the school curriculums at all levels of basic education.¹⁷ The Commission on Higher Education’s Memorandum Order No. 31, series of 1996, encourages “all higher education institutions to initiate human rights education and training projects including the integration of human rights concepts in all their curricular offerings.”¹⁸ Agencies and institutions likewise entered into formal agreements for joint human rights education activities. For example,

the Commission on Human Rights has signed memoranda of agreement with education-related agencies of the government for this purpose.

In 1988, complying with its constitutional mandate, the Commission established a Human Rights Education and Training Program (HRETP).¹⁹ This was in line with its Short-Term Human Rights Education Program Plan to "lay the groundwork for the continuous improvement of the human rights situation in the country and in raising the Philippine human rights standards by promoting the people's rights through a continuing program of education, training and research."²⁰ In August 1994, acting on the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which affirmed the importance of national institutions for human rights education,²¹ and the call for support for human rights education by the first United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Commission submitted to the High Commissioner its Recommended Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education.²² The Philippines also adheres to and implements the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which stresses that human rights knowledge and skills are not the only target areas of competency for human rights education, but also attitudes and behavior.²³ The country is a party to almost all the core international human rights treaties. Thus, the education of rights also draws on them and other soft law human rights instruments.

Aligning with international goals, human rights education in the Philippines is based on the two general objectives of "learning for human rights" and "learning about human rights."²⁴ Because of its constitutional mandate, the Commission on Human Rights occupies a key position, providing direct and indirect human rights education interventions. The central office of the Commission, primarily through the Human Rights Education and Promotion Office, performs oversight functions over all the direct and indirect human rights education projects and activities of the constitutional body. The office also implements nationwide interventions. In different parts of the country, the regional offices of the Commission carry out the crucial task of human rights education. Such projects and activities include, but are not limited to, trainings, seminars, and workshops on human rights and different allied topics.

Illustrated below is the human rights education operations framework (pre-"new normal") with identified actors as channel of promotion efforts and target audiences.

Table 1. Human Rights Education Operations Framework²⁵

Channel of Promotion Efforts	Target Audience
Print and broadcast media; non-governmental, civic and religious organizations	General public
Department of Education	General public Teachers, in-school youth, and students (P2)
Civil Service Commission; government agencies	Civil servants, government employees, local government units (P3)
Departments of Labor and Employment, Foreign Affairs, and Trade and Industry; Securities and Exchange Commission	Workers, foreign governments
Professional Regulation Commission	Professionals
Department of Justice, Supreme Court, Philippine Judicial Academy	Judges, prosecutors, investigators (P1A)
Philippine National Police, Armed Forces of the Philippines, Departments of National Defense and Interior and Local Government, Police and military academies	Police, paramilitary, military, law enforcers (P1B)
Peace panel, Non-governmental organizations	Others

Note: P refers to priority number

The Commission provides education to different duty-bearers and rights-holders on human rights concepts and principles, as well as those required by domestic law to be taught. Other entities, aside from the Commission, are also engaged and are therefore involved in human rights education in the Philippines, i.e., various government agencies, civil society, members of the academe, and faith-based organizations.

The framework above depicts the various institutional channels for human rights education and their corresponding audiences. Each institution works towards the goals of “upholding, respecting, promoting, defending, and fulfilling human rights” through the education of their respective constituents. The institutional bodies are actors in the human rights education process.

The Commission engages the actors through joint and inter-agency efforts, including agencies in the committee designated to celebrate the National Human Rights Consciousness Week (December 4 to 10 of every year) under Republic Act No. 9201 or the National Human Rights Consciousness Week Act of 2002. As an example, the Commission spearheaded the 20th National Human Rights Consciousness Week (NHRCW) Kick-Off Ceremony on 5 December 2022 with the theme, “*Pagtataguyod at Pagsusulong ng mga Karapatang Pantao Tungo sa Matatag na Pundasyon*

ng Kapayapaan, Katarungan, Kalikasan, Kaunlaran at Bayanihan” (Promotion and Advocacy of Human Rights Toward the Foundation of Peace, Justice, Nature, Development and Working Together) aligned with the global slogan of Human Rights Day, “Dignity, Freedom, and Justice for All”. Twenty years since the first Human Rights Week was celebrated by virtue of Republic Act No. 9201, the Commission, along with a number of government agencies and civil society organizations comprising the NHRCW Committee, reaffirmed their commitment to performing mandates to uphold dignity, freedom, and justice for all.



(This page and next page, top photo) Kick-Off Ceremony of the 2022 National Human Rights Consciousness Week.



The Commission's activities for the 2022 National Human Rights Consciousness Week celebration done through art discourse included the following:

- Inter-Law School Human Rights Debate Tournament;
- Human Rights Spoken Word Poetry Contest;
- Human Rights Singing Contest;
- Human Rights Declamation Contest; and
- Human Rights Extemporaneous Contest.



Announcement of activities during the 2022 Human Rights Week celebration.

Art discourse is the prescription of meanings and insights to artistic performances. In the case of the human rights in the arts discourse, the National Human Rights Consciousness Week ensured that the entries provided by participants in the Spoken Word Poetry Contest, Singing Contest, and Declamation Contest touched on human rights. Questions provided for extemporaneous contests and the inter-law school human rights debate tournament should also be relevant and about contemporary human rights issues.

Inter-Law School Human Rights Debate Tournament

In celebration of the 2022 NHRCW, CHR organized a human rights debate tournament for law students. The debate



First inter-law school human rights debate.

tournament was designed to allow law students to learn and engage with human rights issues, hone their critical thinking skills, and be inspired to love and know their rights. It was also meant to reinvigorate the debate scene in the country about human rights.

In the 2022 debate tournament, law students from several law schools debated on the importance of human rights and its inherent, universal and irrevocable nature regardless of one's social standing, gender orientation or religious beliefs. Twenty-two teams from seventeen law schools from different parts of the country participated in the debate.

The law students debated on rights issues in education (mandatory Reserve Officers' Training Corps [ROTC], hybrid vs. face-to-face classes, banning of books), labor (closed shop unions, right to strike for government employees, commercial sex work), religion (tax exemptions for religious institutions and organizations of "other beliefs," strict separation of church and state vs. benevolent neutrality, freedom of religion and freedom to offend religion) and the environment (taxing carbon emissions, idle lands, climate change).

The debate tournament also helped educate people about their human rights and how to assert, defend and realize them. The final round of the tournament was live-streamed using the Human Rights Institute Facebook page. There was a high engagement in the comment section while the debate was ongoing manifesting the involvement and interest of the viewers in the discourse. Important points that were raised by debaters during the tournament were turned into social media cards as part of the learning experience not only by those who joined the debate but also for the online supporters and viewers of the tournament.

The judges for the debate consisted of members of the bench (Judge SJ Torres, Judge Carlo Villarama, Judge Joeven Dellosa), law professors (Ted Te, Mike Tiu, Lee Edson Yarcia), law practitioners (Atty Anmau Manigbas, Atty. Jenin Velasquez, Atty. Kiko Corpuz, Atty. Roni Lucas Barrios, Atty. Carl Vincent Quitoriano), and seasoned debate organizers (Elaiza Usisa, Timothy Bautista, and Kyle Angelo Walsh Atega).

CHR partnered with the University of the Philippines College of Law, Philippine Association of Law Schools, San Beda Law Debate Circle, San Beda Human Rights Advocates, and the United Nations Joint Programme on Human Rights in organizing the debate tournament.



Scenes from the first inter-law school human rights debate tournament on human rights.

The winning teams in the 2022 Inter-Law School Human Rights Debate Tournament were from the University of the Philippines College of Law, San Beda College Alabang, Saint Louis University School of Law, and San Beda University College of Law.

YSpeak

The CHR holds webinars called YSpeak Learning Snippets on various topics.²⁶ As part of the 2022 National Human Rights Consciousness Celebration, webinars on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Basics of Human Rights for Students and Teachers were organized on 9 December 2022 via Zoom and streamed live in the Human Rights Institute Facebook page.



Special Citation Awards

The CHR gives Special Citation Awards to individuals and institutions that show exemplary commitment to elevating human rights engagement in their respective fields. These institutions and individuals are recognized for commendable contributions and accomplishments in human rights promotion, prevention, and policy beyond their mandates.

The Special Citation Awards consist of several Gawad Karapatang Pantao categories:

- Gawad Sulong Karapatan – Award for Programs, Projects and

Activities that promote human rights through education, training, advocacy and research;

- Gawad Gabay Karapatan - Award for Programs, Projects and Activities that further human rights through policymaking;
- Gawad Bantay Karapatan – Award for Programs, Projects and Activities that prevent human rights violations in jails, detention centers, confinement and other similar facilities.

The 2022 Special Citation Awardees are the following:

- Gawad Sulong Karapatan Winner
Liliw National High School (Laguna province)
- Gawad Gabay Karapatan Winner
Guagua District Jail Male Dormitory (Pampanga province)
- Gawad Bantay Karapatan Winner
Jail Superintendent Roque Constantino A. Sison III.



2022 Special Citation Awardees.

Human Rights Education Training Program

Since the inception of the Human Rights Education Training Program (HRETP), the Commission has implemented tiers of prioritization in terms of target audiences through multiple channels. Prioritization is accorded to judges, prosecutors, and investigators (Priority 1A); police, paramilitary, military, and law enforcers (Priority 1B); teachers and in-school youth and students (Priority 2); and civil servants, government employees, and local government units (Priority 3).²⁷ While the internet and social media had been utilized for human rights education before the COVID-19 pandemic, they are used in a different way now.

The theory for prioritization is that duty-bearers of rights, including the academe, have to learn human rights concepts and principles for their effective compliance with human rights obligations and for the prevention of human rights violations, and essentially, for the respect, protection, and fulfillment of rights. The long-term investment in the human rights education of duty-bearers would result in better human rights compliance. The Commission advocates for and participates in work aimed at the continuous

integration of human rights in basic, higher, and technical education, as well as the education of the security sector and other priority sectors, i.e., teacher education. The security sector has notably designated human rights offices to promote human rights: Center for the Law of Armed Conflict and the different human rights offices of the major services of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police Human Rights Affairs Office.



Blood donation drives attended by the security sector during the COVID-19 pandemic (December 2020, 2021, and 2022) not only saved lives, but also became avenues to teach and promote human rights and the right to health. Traditional face-to-face sessions with them were still conducted (although limited). There were many Zoom training sessions for the security sector on human rights topics.

Importantly, the Commission carries out advocacy and information campaigns for rights-holders. The campaigns are decided according to the needs of the time, e.g., right to life (sustaining the prohibition of the death penalty), right to political participation (encouraging voters to register and vote), digital rights (spreading the word that rights offline are also rights online), and right to mental health (popularizing the right and linking rights-holders to services available to them as service-users). Each campaign comes with campaign tag-lines and calls to action and messages attuned to the respect, protection, and fulfillment of those rights, plus a set of related projects and activities. This involves building alliances with several groups and proponents so they can be readily tapped as force multipliers and pro-

viders of valuable feedback on the effectiveness of human rights education on the ground.

The Advocacy and Information Campaign Division (AICD) of the Human Rights Education and Promotion Office launched the Human Rights through Arts and Culture project in 2022. The project primarily focuses on reaching out to different communities and institutions through various outreach programs, immersion activities, partnerships, and collaborations with the different stakeholders of the AICD campaigns. Under this project, AICD organizes Human Rights Art Workshops to help the youth, youth with disabilities, marginalized communities, indigenous peoples, and the poor develop their skills, talents, and passion for arts, and help them exercise their rights fully and freely, particularly their freedom of expression.

AICD held its first activity for an indigenous community on 27 November 2022 in an Aeta community in Tarlac province. It held a workshop that aimed to train the members of the community on assuming active role in preserving their tradition and culture through the use of arts and uphold the concept of equality, equity and human rights.



Art workshop for indigenous children, Tarlac province, 27 November 2022.

Modules, Curriculum, Teaching Exemplars

The Commission produces modules, curriculums, teaching exemplars, and other information, education, and campaign materials (knowledge products) to support all the efforts above. Examples are collateral materials—t-shirts, backpacks, tumblers, stickers, calendars, and the like—that teach the importance of human rights. There is, for example, a material on mental health as a basic human right due to the mental health issues that surfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The materials are distributed through its regional offices and civil society partners, for instance, to target communities. Human rights education teaching exemplars to primary school teachers provide models on how to include human rights lessons into curriculums.²⁸ Procedures are in place to ensure the appropriateness of the content and its delivery. Consultative workshops and other similar activities are quality control checks.



Example of an information, education, and campaign material on human rights.



Covers of some of the materials on different human rights topics (produced during the COVID-19 pandemic).



Right to mental health training modules.

With these, the Commission implements an integrated and incorporated model of human rights education.

Innovations and Initiatives

1. Highlighting COVID-19-Related Rights in Human Rights Education

The Commission launched multiple series of webinars that educate people about the right to health, the rights of people arrested due to quarantine and other health restrictions, and the rights of people under custodial investigation, including concerns of torture and enforced disappearances. People were informed about derogations and limitations or restrictions to rights and their safeguards. The rights of those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, different groups of people such as those with co-morbidities, frontliners, women, children, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples, had to be addressed. The disparate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on them and on communities was not neglected. Vaccine hesitancy, prompting the Commission to include in its information campaign on the right to health a call for vaccine equity, had to be focused on. The availability, accessibility, acceptability, and especially, the adaptability of the right to education became rallying causes. Accompanying COVID-19 was the rise of mental illness brought about by anxiety, fear, isolation, absence of social contact, and loss (of loved ones, of one's way of life, and of livelihood). The Commission conducted a series of webinars on mental health as a human right in order to provide guidance and a venue for discussion for both duty-bearers and rights-holders.

2. Communicating Social and Behavioral Change

The Commission adopted the Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) approach in using communication tactics based on behavioral science to positively change knowledge, attitudes, and social norms among individuals, institutions, and communities. It differs from more conventional forms of communication in that it involves two-way exchanges of ideas and information with groups of people, organizations, and

even entire societies as part of a larger effort to spread knowledge, inspire action, and solve problems.²⁹ SBCC is built on the three pillars of communication, social change, and behavior change.

The SBCC approach supports the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which stresses that human rights education is ultimately for attitudinal and behavioral change.

This approach has been used in campaigns to raise awareness of human rights violations, dispel myths and prejudice, and motivate audiences to advocate for equality and social justice. Several SBCC campaigns and projects have been launched to tackle various human rights issues. For example, a number of Filipino digital creators crafted documentary miniseries and multimedia campaigns to raise awareness of the struggles of domestic workers and manufacturing workers who are regularly exploited and mistreated.³⁰ The Commission has used it to tackle disinformation and misinformation.

Further, the Commission established a number of programs which seek to boost awareness and shape perspectives on human rights that are relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as *YSPEAK* and *Know Your Rights*. The “YSpeak Learning Snippet on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Basics of Human Rights for Students and Teachers” was held online, for example, through Zoom, in December 2022 as part of the NHRCW celebration. The *YSPEAK* program aims to educate a broad audience on their human rights at different levels and sectors through accessible online means. Through *YSPEAK*, various educational topics have been tackled, such as sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, women empowerment and breaking biases, and mainstreaming human rights in elections.

3. Digitalizing Human Rights Education



YSPEAK Session on Women Empowerment: Breaking Biases Promotional Material



YSPEAK Learning Snippet on the UDHR and Basics of Human Rights Promotional Material

Filipino students and educators could take advantage of Zoom classes and other online classrooms, study printed modules or offline digital media, or combine the two in what are called hybrid modalities.³¹ In line with these, the *Online Human Rights Academy*, an online learning management system on human rights, was launched. It is the first of its kind among nationally-based platforms. Amidst the limitations brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, education—specifically, human rights education—was made possible. The Academy offers open online courses on human rights. There are general courses, specialized courses, and professional and executive courses. The general certificate courses present an introduction to human rights (also the right to health because of the COVID-19 pandemic). It offers courses designed to help one learn the basic concepts and principles of human rights. It is equipped with various videos and quizzes that complement the entire learning experience. The specialized certificate courses are on highly specialized topics developed by experts from their respective fields and sectors. These courses aim to promote awareness and promote societal involvement. They provide thorough human rights discussions complementing the basic concepts and principles of human rights that are discussed in the general certificate courses. The professional and executive certificate courses aim to provide an in-depth discussion of the most talked-about human rights issues developed for the professionals, executives, members of the security sector, and advanced students wishing to complete and further their knowledge and understanding of human rights.

Free Online Certificate Course

The 2022 Online Certificate Course entitled “Pagtatanggol ng mga Karapatang Pantao” (Protecting Human Rights) held on 21-25 November 2022 was a specialized certificate course involving five technical training hours. Participants must have completed either the Certificate Course on Human Rights 101 or the Certificate Course on Right to Health to qualify for the course.

This free online course is conducted through the asynchronous mode of learning. It allows enrollees to learn using their own schedule within the given course duration. There are three (3) modules included in the certificate course:

Module 1: Human Rights Concepts and Principles

Module 2: Civil and Political Rights

Module 3: Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

Each module has an assessment page. Assessment in every module has five items, for a total of fifteen assessment questions for the whole Course. An enrollee must have correct answers on at least ten questions out of the fifteen questions to be eligible for a Certificate of Completion.

Representing the digital shift in educational strategies, the Online Human Rights Academy has strengthened its efforts in making human rights education accessible, flexible, and convenient despite physical limitations in learning. It offers a storehouse of digitalized information, education, and campaign materials on human rights that also consist of on-demand recordings of webinars and other online collateral materials. Facebook and other social media sites to spread the word about human rights have also gained popularity. The graduates of these courses include those from the general public, teachers/educators, students, and members of the security sector.

A Zoom session with the graduates of a certificate course on human rights

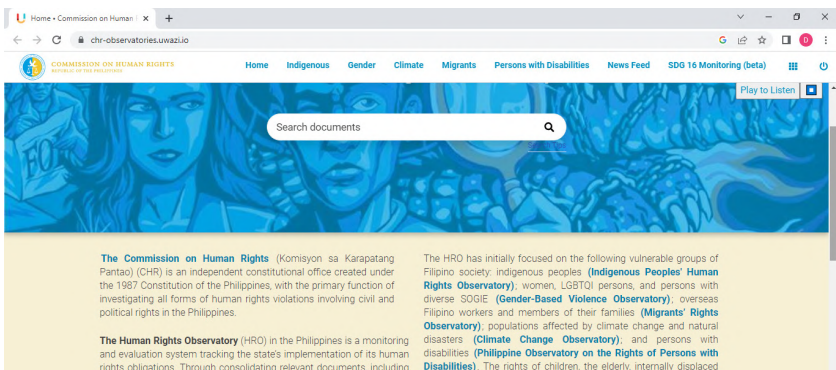


As digital and online media become even more pervasive in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, they were also used to advance human rights awareness among a broader target audience via digital campaigns.

One innovation brought about by the use of technology was the distribution of photos depicting scenes of daily Filipino struggles, which triggered online discussions on human rights and allowed netizens the exercise of their right to free speech and expression. The Commission produced a series of videos and social media posts on Instagram through and with social media influencers in a project called *Know Your Rights*. Social listening was employed to track and monitor progress.

Digital Monitoring of Human Rights

Digitalizing human rights education is part of a series of digital human rights work. Previously, for instance, the Commission launched the digital monitoring of human rights situations among the different vulnerable sectors in the country, and for storing information and data related to human rights. It established the *Human Rights Observatory* as a monitoring and evaluation system to track the state's implementation of human rights obligations. In consolidating relevant documents, including laws, bills, ordinances, treaties as well as the documentation of Supreme Court cases on human rights, human rights violation cases reported to the Commission, and situational reports, the observatory uses a human rights-based approach to data analysis. The observatory consists of different systems for various vulnerable groups in the country—such as indigenous peoples, women, populations affected by climate change, overseas Filipino workers and members of their families, and persons with disabilities.³²



The Human Rights Observatory webpage.

The Human Rights Observatory webpage is a monitoring and evaluation system used and maintained by the policy cluster of the Commission. There are five observatories at the moment. They respectively focus on gender, climate change, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, and indigenous peoples. See Appendix A for a short description of the observatories for these issues.

Another digital initiative is the *Digital Archive: KIBO*, a repository of the Commission’s collection of digital assets such as video, images, audio files, among others, with the intention of providing long-term access to information with varying evidential, legal, or contextual value.³³ The word KIBO is a shortened version of the Filipino word ‘arkibo’ which means archive. These are all in addition to the existing website and Facebook page of the Commission.



KIBO webpage

4. Engaging Traditional Actors, Involving “New” Actors and Audiences

Human rights education and promotion efforts have historically focused on formal education audiences like schools and government agencies, the police and the armed forces, and non-formal education audiences like legal groups, faith-based organizations, and communities. It has been these groups that have occasionally taken the lead in also disseminating human rights information. The security sector is responsible, to illustrate, for pre-service and in-service education and training on human rights, while the education sector is tasked with spreading human rights education through

curricular (such as academic courses, research, and trainings) and co-curricular and extra-curricular (such as student organizations) activities.

The Commission launched the “[#NaritoAngCHR](#)” (CHR is Here) program in 2022 to reach out to the different regions of the Philippines. This program is implemented by the regional offices of the Commission. Several sessions under “[#NaritoAngCHR](#)” program were held in 2022 and first quarter of 2023.

The Region XII Office of the Commission in collaboration with the National Irrigation Administration held a one-day seminar on the “Use of Gender-Fair Language and Rights Against All Forms of Harassment in a Workplace” on 25 November 2022 in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat in commemoration of the 18-Day Campaign to [#EndViolenceAgainstWomen](#). The officers of the Region XII Office served as trainers in this seminar.



Miguel Peñaloza served as a trainer of the Region XII Office of the Commission in the Criminal Investigation Course conducted by Philippine National Police Region XII in Koronadal city on 6 January 2023. He discussed “Human Rights Issues in the Context of Investigation Procedures with Case Analysis.”

The Region XI Office of the Commission held an orientation session on several topics including the Basic Concepts of Human Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Bill of Rights during the Focused Reformation/Reorientation and Moral Enhancement for Police Officers in Line with Internal Cleansing Efforts of PNP XI held on 11 January 2023 at Montevista, Davao de Oro.



[#NaritoAngCHR](#)



The Region I Office of the Commission held a *Kabataan Karapatan* (Youth Rights) Caravan at Saint Augustine’s School, Tagudin, Ilocos Sur on 17 January 2023.

The Region XII Office of the Commission discussed Human Rights-based Policing during the Public Safety Basic Recruit Course on



25-26 January 2023 by PNPTI-Bangsa Moro Autonomous Region Training Center in Parang, Maguindanao de Norte.

On the same date (25-26 January 2023), the Region IV-A Office of the Commission held an online Human Rights Training for the Public Safety Basic Recruit Course focusing on a number of topics including Human Rights-based Policing, constitutional and legal bases of human rights promotion, Philippine National Police (PNP) Doctrine, Policies and Issuances on Human Rights, and several relevant laws.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the academe was engaged in establishing *Centers for Human Rights Education*, dedicated centers in schools and universities that integrate human rights in school curriculum, research on human rights issues and concerns, and conduct extension work on human rights. There are now more than sixty different Centers in provinces in the country. Their representatives joined the first *Human Rights Educators Forum* in 2021. These Centers have pioneering role in disseminating information on human rights in their respective local areas.

The Ateneo de Zamboanga University (AdZU), through the Youth Alliance for Human Rights Ateneo - YAHRA and Social Awareness and Community Service Involvement Office - AdZU, serves as the Center for Human Rights Education in Region IX.³⁴ Presently, YAHRA is the only organization in Region IX that is dedicated to promoting human rights awareness through educational programs and activities.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on the country's social and educational landscape, new actors and audiences have surfaced, and they proved to be effective vehicles for receiving and disseminating human rights education and awareness.

The Commission also works with legal groups, faith-based organizations, media groups, and other special interest groups considered to be “human rights organizations,” albeit, in a nontraditional capacity.

5. Institutionalizing Human Rights Education through the Human Rights Institute

The Human Rights Institute was established to materialize the vision and necessity to strategically educate and promote human rights in the Philippines and of Filipinos around the globe. The Institute is considered a milestone. It offers free online certificate courses on human rights along three strands: general, specialized, and executive. The general courses are on the basics of human rights and the right to health. The specialized courses are over twenty courses on specific human rights topics and on the rights of vulnerable groups in society. The executive courses are designed for human rights duty-bearers and other pre-identified audiences.

With this, a new strategy was formulated, guided by the purposes of human rights education. The Institute was envisioned to be the fit-for-purpose structure that would enable the strategies to succeed, and it is expected to evolve over time. Because of the Institute, which now uses the *Online Human Rights Academy* as its online platform and the “Human Rights Institute” on Facebook as one of its promotional channels, thousands of people have been able to learn human rights even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Institute is able to establish partnership with educational institutions and other organizations.



Partnership agreements with different institutions

One of the partnerships forged was with Lagro High School. On 16 September 2022, the Human Rights Education and Promotion Office signed a Partnership Accord with the Lagro High School. The latter shall utilize the human rights audio-visual instructional materials of the Commission in partnership with the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the Philippines to integrate human rights concepts into the *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* or Values Education Curriculum of Grades 7-10. Another

is with IDEALS, Inc., which will mutually develop and implement with the Commission social and behavior change communication by reviewing and improving learning and training materials that can be used by educators to effectively teach human rights-related topics.

The Institute became an avenue that encouraged more human rights education efforts in and with schools and with education-focused civil society organizations.

Reflections, Realizations, and Possible Future Directions

The first realization is that human rights education in the Philippines, and indeed in the world, has changed or has been forced to change and adapt because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Operational frameworks of human rights education have been rewritten. Old frameworks needed to be adapted to the modern times and to the present-day demands of the world where aside from COVID-19 pandemic, there are also the phenomena of misinformation and disinformation around rights, the vilification of human rights defenders, the so-called “backsliding” of commitments to human rights by some states, and the global rise of social media and even artificial intelligence. While all of the earlier mentioned initiatives and efforts of the Commission during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a greater understanding of human rights, more however needs to be done in this regard.

The global operational framework of human rights education also badly needs more clarity. The global community could and should advocate for a human rights treaty that directly addresses and mandates states to educate about, for, and through human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education are not enough to push the further development of human rights education. The world needs to have a clearly binding set of norms that dictate human rights education as a right and guides human rights education as a movement. At present, there is none. It was the aspiration of the framers of the UDHR that it be followed through with a binding treaty (or treaties). The UDHR itself states that progressive means have to be adopted to meet the needs of the times when it comes to human rights education.

The second is that digitalization is a pressing concern and an inevitable need for human rights education. Not only old frameworks need revisiting, but also old ways of doing things. Amidst steadily increasing digitalization

both globally and locally, along with increasing web connectivity, especially its rise in demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, knowledge producers are now shifting their education and training models from traditional brick-and-mortar methods to those that use modern technology—such as online education using various learning applications. Online education disseminates information and education over the internet. It includes the sharing of information and ideas among individuals all over the world, as well as the expansion of educational opportunities to wider audiences. The public now has access to a variety of learning resources, including formal and informal educational tools built into popular social media sites and specialized apps designed to facilitate learning. Online human rights education is one mechanism to create greater awareness with just one click.

Experience in this regard shows that in the Philippines, which is the social media capital of the world, the digitalization of human rights education holds much promise and potential to fulfill the goals of human rights education. The use of mobile devices and the prevalence of smartphones with internet access are both on steady rise. One of the most discussed topics in the field of education is also the concept of “personalized learning,” in which people have more say over their education and become more than passive recipients of information; they actively generate new knowledge through group work and the sharing of information made possible by the widespread use of smartphone applications. The advantages of online learning include flexible learning time, comfort, self-paced learning and lower costs, as well as greater incentive in taking online courses for professional development.³⁵ It can reach more people and more places in an instant especially in a diverse space and an archipelago like the Philippines.

Online learning of human rights, however, may be affected by the digital divide, the North-South divide and other intersectional factors. Students who do not have access to digital educational resources are disadvantaged, especially with the shift of education from physical to virtual or hybrid. This is a larger education issue that also affects the learning of rights. Lack of financial resources to purchase electronic gadgets and internet service, and poor internet signal remains an issue to Filipino students especially in far-flung areas.³⁶ In a country of around one hundred ten million people, less than a fifth have internet access, and most lack access to digital gadgets.³⁷ The problem of the digital divide is not only limited to students, but also affects teachers, especially in public schools. Whereas students struggle with

limited internet connectivity and frequent distractions at home, teachers face the challenge of navigating the complex and unfamiliar mechanisms of digital teaching platforms.

Thus, the accessibility of digital learning systems must be improved through, among others, the provision of support and resources, especially for the marginalized, and the reach of human rights education programs must be boosted to include disadvantaged learners (and educators) through heightened initiatives. Human rights education addresses existing inequalities; but it can also re-assert and reinforce inequalities and inequities, thereby becoming the very tool of discrimination. Since human rights education does not only involve learning about human rights and the mechanisms that respect, protect, and fulfill them, skills on how to spread human rights protection and promotion messages the fastest, the farthest, and the most equitable way possible must be developed.

The third is recognizing that human rights education requires the contribution of many actors and voices. For this, it is important to cultivate networks of traditional and nontraditional partners who can serve as force multipliers in the dissemination of human rights messages. They should be provided with, and also be an essential part of, the production of materials, such as modules, and localized and popular information packets.

There are outstanding pitfalls and opportunities for improvement that should still be considered and addressed. For one, human rights knowledge may stagnate at the appreciation level only. In the Philippines, studies show that the level of human rights education has largely been at the appreciation level. In recent years, the Social Weather Stations published reports containing the results of public polls measuring attitudes and sentiments to prevalent human rights issues. People have substantial awareness of human rights and human rights violations which plague the country, specifically in the areas of the right to life, freedom of speech, and trust in the police. This finding entails implications on the necessary improvements made in the security and judicial systems of the country. However, many Filipinos have a hard time choosing "human rights-linked" attitudes and behaviors. These results confirm the findings of earlier studies. Necessarily, human rights education at the "community" or "people level" requires that it be made more appealing or even attractive, to those who are not inclined to give it attention.

Moreover, a lot needs to be done to empower the duty-bearers and educators of human rights. The education of the security sector on human rights and international humanitarian law, for instance, should continue. Regarding teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards human rights, a study in 2000 found that out of twenty-nine teacher-respondents from Nueva Ecija province in the Philippines, only one claimed to have attended a training workshop on human rights education. When asked to rate themselves in terms of their knowledge on human rights, there was an equal number of teachers who had much knowledge about human rights versus those who did not. A great majority of the teachers from the sample believed that the government grants people's human rights rather than protects them.³⁸ This and other findings indicate the need for stronger efforts in human rights education capacity-building and training among educators—not also only among those in the academe.

Also, human rights should be taught in schools globally and there are smart ways of doing so. In the Philippines, although human rights issues and concerns are generally incorporated in various subjects taught in schools, the integration of human rights values in basic education (primary and secondary levels) needs to be intensified and not limited to *Araling Panlipunan* (Social Studies). A 2008 study conducted by Maricel Fernandez and Alex Brillantes showed that while the operational framework for human rights education in the country is in place and human rights are somehow integrated into classroom curriculums, the implementation is lacking, possibly due to limitations in time and resources, and teachers do not see it as a priority. Since human rights are merely integrated rather than highlighted, not enough time is allotted to their teaching, amounting to a meager two minutes of inclusion at the end of the course.³⁹

To be sure, a lot of developments have been made at this front, including the recent requirement for GMRC and Values Education to include the teaching of human rights in basic education. Labor rights also have to be now taught in college. However, continuing changes in the curriculums need to ensure that human rights are not lost, but meaningfully and effectively integrated, and are actually taught in schools. In higher education in the Philippines, human rights (i.e., the Bill of Rights) are currently integrated in the curriculum, occasionally in the National Service Training Program, and in several Social Sciences courses in the form of educating students about the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Other opportunities where educators may

incorporate human rights teachings include subjects related to Gender and Development (GAD) and Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC). The promotion and inclusion of human rights in teaching content may be further enhanced and developed in higher education.

A most salient issue of human rights education globally are the myths surrounding human rights. They continue to pervade. Human rights may be seen, for example, as 'anti-government' or a 'threat' to societal values. Disinformation and misinformation solidify the myths. These mythical blocks prevent states from further cultivating a culture of human rights and conducting human rights education in the first place. This calls for an all-out push to dispel the myths about human rights even inside the academe and among human rights educators. A lot can be done in this regard. One is addressing the incongruence between the demand and the available financial and material resources for human rights teaching. Human rights education interventions have to be monitored and evaluated also to ensure effectiveness in battling shifting narratives that vilify human rights. Part of it is capacity-building, but also finding out and using effective means for human rights education. Monitoring awareness, knowledge, values/attitudes, and behaviors related to human rights is a must. Monitoring the state of human rights awareness can paint a clearer picture of how states and people regard human rights, and can help aim for well-informed human rights education program. It is also crucial to the survival and resurgence of the human rights movement as a whole. Finally, stronger monitoring initiatives must track the quality of human rights education resources. Earlier white papers have recommended the creation of monitoring and evaluation schemes for human rights education programs in the academe to be developed by government education agencies, especially for in-service teacher training.

Yet the prevalence of myths around human rights and all other factors discussed above have called into question the effectiveness of the gains and successes of human rights education as a movement that has begun in the 1970s. The "new normal" is but an awakening for the movement. Human rights education has faced challenges regarding its effectiveness, and the "new normal" has resurfaced the underbelly of the issues. The means and methods of human rights education require a re-examination, particularly on adaptability to or flexibility with the changing times. Criteria for best practices/models in the area of human rights education must be developed for imitation and adaptation by all concerned, and more scientific and data-

driven ways to improve the effectiveness of human rights education. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, human rights education necessitated a paradigm shift. This has resulted in the ongoing re-drawing of the framework of human rights education in the world.

Endnotes

- 1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Preamble.
- 2 Ibid., Article 26.
- 3 See Jost Stellmacher and Gert Sommer, Human Rights Education: An Evaluation of University Seminars, *Social Psychology*, Vol. 39, pages 70-80 (2008).
- 4 Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995-2004: Human Rights Education - Lessons for Life (1996).
- 5 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, available at: www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/right-human-rights-education (last accessed 3 January 2023).
- 6 See David F. Suarez, "The Institutionalization of Human Rights Education," in David P. Beker and Alexander W. Wiseman (eds.), *The Impact of Comparative Education Research on Institutional Theory* (International Perspectives on Education and Society, Vol. 7), pages 95-120 (2006).
- 7 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, Article 2, para. 2.
- 8 UNICEF Philippines, Filipino children continue missing education opportunities in another year of school closure (August 25, 2021), available at www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/filipino-children-continue-missing-education-opportunities-another-year-school (last accessed 3 January 2023).
- 9 1987 Philippine Constitution, Article XIII, Section 18(5). Reiterated in Executive Order No. 163, series of 1987, Section 3(5).
- 10 Ibid., Article XIV, Section 3(2).
- 11 The following laws have provisions on human rights education:
 Republic Act No. 11648 or an "Act providing for stronger protection against rape and sexual exploitation and abuse, increasing the age for determining the commission of statutory rape," enacted in March 2022;
 Republic Act No. 11596 or an "Act prohibiting the practice of child marriage and imposing penalties for violations thereof," enacted in December 2021; and
 Anti-Violence against Women and their Children Act (RA 9262).
- 12 Republic Act No. 9745, Anti-Torture Act of 2009, Section 21.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 An Act Institutionalizing Good Manners and Right Conduct and Values Education in the K to 12 Curriculum, Appropriating Funds Therefor, and for Other Purposes (GMRC and Values Education Act), Republic Act No. 11476, Official Gazette, www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2020/06jun/20200625-RA-NO-11476-RRD.pdf.
- 15 Republic Act No. 11476, Good Manners and Right Conduct and Values Education Act, Section 5.

16 Ibid., Section 2, 3(b).

17 Nerissa Lansangan-Losaria, “The Human Rights Education Program of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) of the Philippines,” *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, volume 1, available at: www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/1998/03/the-human-rights-education-program-of-the-department-of-education-culture-and-sports-decs-of-the-phi.html (last accessed 3 January 2023).

18 Ana Elzy E. Ofreneo, “Philippine Commission on Human Rights: More than Two Decades of Promoting Human Rights in Schools,” *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, volume 12, available at www.hurights.or.jp/archives/pdf/education12/hreas-12-04-philippines.pdf (last accessed 3 January 2023).

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, para. 36 (1993).

22 The general Philippine experience on human rights education has received recognition from the international community. In 1994, the Commission was awarded the 1994 UNESCO Prize for the Teaching of Human Rights. The citation noted CHRP’s human rights education program for the police and the military establishment during the 1987-1994 period.

23 Office of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, World Programme for Human Rights Education: Fourth Phase Plan of Action, page 17 (2022).

24 Commission on Human Rights, Human Rights Education System: Final Report and User’s Guide (2013), page 1, available at www.ombudsman.gov.ph/UNDP4/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/hr-education-system.pdf (last accessed 3 January 2023).

25 Adopted and modified from Ofreneo (note 18) page 29.

26 YSpeak Webinars are accessible in the following links:

YSpeak: Understanding International Humanitarian Law (IHL) for Teachers and Students <https://fb.watch/j1cC86Nu5/>

Bawal Bastos Law: Ligtas na Espasyo Para sa Lahat, <https://fb.watch/j1coMAAg5s/>

Nanay, Lola, Mamita at iba pa. Ang Kanilang Katatagan, Karapatan at Kontribusyon sa ating Lipunan! The Resilience and Contributions of Older Women, <https://fb.watch/j1cMaPoAdR/>

YSpeak: WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: Breaking Biases!, <https://fb.watch/j1cOEeuJug/>

YSpeak: Mainstreaming Human Rights in Elections!, <https://fb.watch/j1cTNc6r65/>

SOGIE 101 for Teachers and Students

<https://fb.watch/j1cV9DrWke/>

27 Ibid.

28 See generally Ofreneo (note 18).

29 See Centre for Social and Behaviour Change Communication, What is SBCC?, available at: www.centreforsbcc.org/what-is-sbcc/ (last accessed 3 January 2023).

30 See USAID, Social and Behavior Change in Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance: A Primer, available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PAooXWX4.pdf (last accessed 3 January 2023).

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32 See Commission on Human Rights, Human Rights Observatory, available at: <https://chr-observatories.uwazi.io/> (last accessed 3 January 2023).

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34 Region 9 is in western Mindanao covering the provinces of Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, and Zamboanga Sibugay, a highly urbanized city (Zamboanga City) and a component city of Isabela. The regional center is in Pagadian City.

35 Stephanie Norman, 5 Advantages of Online Learning: Education Without Leaving Home (10 March 2016), available at: <https://elearningindustry.com/5-advantages-of-online-learning-education-without-leaving-home> (last accessed 3 January 2023).

36 ChildHope Philippines, The Current Education Issues in the Philippines — and How Childhope Rises to the Challenge (25 August 2021), available at <https://childhope.org.ph/education-issues-in-the-philippines/> (last accessed January 3, 2023).

37 Alfredo M. Esteban, Jr. and Mar Joy P. Cruz, “Digital Divide in Times of Pandemic among Teacher Education Students,” Open Access Library Journal, Vol. 8, No. 4, April 2021, available at www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=108423#ref25 (last accessed 3 January 2023).

38 See Anita Magbitang-Chauhan, Marites Dalangin, Lolita Santos, and Lasila Reyes, “Philippines: Human Rights Education in Nueva Ecija,” *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, volume 3, available at www.hurights.or.jp/archives/pdf/asia-s-ed/v03/o7chauhan.pdf (last accessed 3 January 2023).

39 See Maricel T. Fernandez and Alex B. Brillantes, “The State of Human Rights Education in the Philippines: Issues, Concerns and Directions,” paper presented at the 7th National Congress on Good Citizenship Forming the Youth into Good Citizens: Contemplating, Articulating, Operationalizing Values, 8 December 2012, available at www.ombudsman.gov.ph/UNDP4/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/The-state-of-Human-Rights.pdf (last accessed 3 January 2023).

Annex A. Human Rights Observatory

The Human Rights Observatory (HRO) has initially focused on the following vulnerable groups of Filipino society: indigenous peoples (Indigenous Peoples’ Human Rights Observatory); women, LGBTQI persons, and persons with diverse SOGIE (Gender-Based Violence Observatory); overseas Filipino workers and members of their families (Migrants’ Rights Observatory); populations affected by climate change and natural disasters (Climate Change Observatory); and persons with disabilities (Philippine Observatory on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). The rights of children, the elderly, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the situation of extrajudicial killings (EJKs) in the Philippines may eventually be included as future observatories as well.

Accessible files in HRO consist of government issuances, treaties and laws, legislative bills, advocacy videos and Commission issuances.

Indigenous Peoples’ Human Rights Observatory

The Indigenous Peoples’ Human Rights Observatory (IPHRO) was conceptualized during the National Inquiry on the Human Rights Situation of Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines, which the CHR spearheaded in 2017 in accordance with its mandates as provided in Article XIII, Section 18 of the 1987 Constitution. Pursuant to the CHR’s strategic objective to strengthen human rights mechanisms, the IPHRO is designed to serve both as a monitoring platform and repository of data under the auspices of CHR, in collaboration with stakeholders, for a unified advocacy towards full realization of human rights of the Indigenous Peoples.

Gender-Based Violence Observatory

The Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Observatory aims to make GBV visible and to facilitate access to resources on GBV. It is a repository of data on GBV, not only of treaties, laws and jurisprudence, but also of women’s lived experiences. It aims to make data work for women, girls, and LGBTQI’s human rights.

Migrants Rights Observatory

The Migrants Rights Observatory develops tools and resources to monitor compliance of the Philippine government with international and national human rights mechanisms, which particularly protect migrants’ rights, including the rights of overseas Filipino workers, the Filipino diaspora, members of their families and migrants in the Philippines.

This current database houses the Supreme Court cases from 1996 to present concerning labor migration. By identifying the nature of the cases, types and locations

of rights violations, the Commission 1) analyzes where the challenges lie in fully implementing laws and policies that aim to protect the rights and welfare of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and their families, 2) discerns gaps in State initiatives, and 3) advocates for human rights-based approaches to labor migration.

Philippine Observatory on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In 2020, against the backdrop of uncertainty brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission initiated the development of the Philippine Observatory on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PhORPD), in active collaboration with six disability rights specialists, who represented the children with disabilities, persons with chronic/psychosocial disability, deaf/hard of hearing, with orthopedic impairment, speech impaired, and visual impaired. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, rapid digital transformation has become even more necessary to keep track of the human rights situation of persons with disabilities in the Philippines. The PhORPD manifests an interactive and reliable information center for, by and with persons with disabilities. It is intended to be continually improved, as it is being utilized, by all stakeholders in pursuit of the principle of universal design as proclaimed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).