



HUMAN RIGHTS

LAW International, Malaysian and Islamic Perspectives

Edited by
Abdul Ghafur Hamid
@ Khin Maung Sein

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Human Rights Law: International, Malaysian and Islamic Perspectives

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Abdul Ghafur Hamid @ Khin Maung Sein

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THOMSON REUTERS

Published in 2012 by
Thomson Reuters Malaysia Sdn Bhd (464942-H)
(trading as Sweet & Maxwell Asia)
No 17, Jalan PJS 7/19, Bandar Sunway
46150 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

Copy no: 112669664
Initial: WMN
Date: 11/7/12
Location: MAIN /PJ /ISTAC /NILAI /K /K2 /TRF

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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Human Rights Law: International, Malaysian and Islamic Perspectives/
edited by Abdul Ghafur Hamid @ Khin Maung Sein

ISBN 978-967-5040-87-0

1. Human rights. 2. Human rights – Malaysia.
3. Human rights – Religious aspects – Islam.
I. Abdul Ghafur Hamid.
341.48

Cover design by Edward Goh

Cover photo © Darren Staples/Reuters

Printed by Print Assist (1901555-V)
7, Jalan Anggerik 5, Bandar Bukit Beruntung, 48300 Rawang, Selangor Darul Ehsan

Affiliated Companies

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100 Harris Street
Pyrmont, Sydney
Australia, NSW 2009

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One Corporate Plaza
2075 Kennedy Road
Scarborough, Ontario M1T 3V4

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10/F, Cityplaza 3
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Hong Kong

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Thomson Reuters Corporation Pte Ltd
18 Science Park Drive
Singapore 118229

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Auckland

UNITED KINGDOM/EUROPE

Sweet & Maxwell Ltd
100 Avenue Road
London NW3 3PF

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St Paul, Minnesota 55164-052

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Editor's Introduction

The world is changing dramatically in the present age of the Internet, rapid communication and movement of persons, and the free flow of messages and ideas across international borders. Ordinary people these days increasingly know more about their fundamental rights. As a result, human rights are not only at the forefront of concerns today for prosecutors and criminal lawyers but also for multinational corporations, businessmen, trade unions, workers in the global economy, and even for the man on the street. The world has become a global village and what happens to individuals in one country often has profound impact on those in other countries.

Whatever the rationale behind the origin of human rights is – be it the command of God Almighty, the theory of natural law, or the idea of a “higher” norm that dictates States to observe the rights of individuals – the subject of human rights has become one of the top priorities for every State in the world. This is truly reflective of the commitment of States proclaimed during the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 to the effect that “Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of Governments.”

The idea of embarking on a research project exploring the width and depth of “International Human Rights Law” originated during brainstorming sessions of the International Law and Maritime Affairs (ILMA) Research Unit of the Ahmad Ibrahim Faculty of Laws, International Islamic University Malaysia. The ILMA Research Unit was established in the Faculty with the primary objective of “promoting interdisciplinary research and consultancy works on specialized areas of international law, including, but not limited to, international human rights law, international trade law, and maritime law.” Due to current trends towards opening up more democratic rights globally as well as locally, members of the Unit decided to take on the subject of human rights and to structure its exploration in such a way that it begins with international human rights law, continues with the Malaysian position in respect of human rights, and ends with the Islamic perspective of human rights, which is the niche area of the University.

The work has accordingly been divided into three parts and consists of 24 chapters. Part I evaluates the nature, scope and effectiveness of the

international legal framework for human rights. The first three chapters deal with the genesis and perspectives of human rights, sources, and the issue of enforcement, respectively. The other chapters give an in-depth analysis of selected fundamental human rights. Within the space constraints, it was necessary to isolate certain rights for consideration. The jurisprudence of the Human Rights Committee and the European Court of Human Rights influenced the selection of rights with the emphasis on rights most commonly claimed by individuals. This is also the main reason why civil and political rights take priority over others. Elements of economic, social and cultural rights and collective rights are, nevertheless, considered where possible.

Part II is entitled "Malaysia and Human Rights: Traditions versus Universality". Originally conceived as a comprehensive analysis of the Malaysian position in relation to the application of international human rights law and the contemporary human rights issues in Malaysia, the contributors who responded have tried their best to present a picture of Malaysia in terms of human rights. It must be noted, however, that after finalizing the chapters, the Government of Malaysia has introduced a number of reforms on human rights, inclusive of announcements repealing the Internal Security Act and other laws restricting the right to liberty, amending laws restricting freedom of assembly, and amending section 15 of the Universities and University Colleges Act 1975 in order that university students can enjoy their civil and political rights. All these proactive movements by the Government towards respecting fundamental human rights in Malaysia are to be warmly welcomed.

The final Part of the work looks at human rights from the Islamic perspective. In other words, this Part elaborates the position of *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) in respect of human rights. The contributors are mostly scholars from the Islamic Law Department of the Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyah of Laws, International Islamic University Malaysia. The Part begins with chapters dealing respectively with the Islamic concept of human rights, a comparison between Islamic human rights and international human rights instruments and basic human rights in Islam. They are followed by an analysis of "Mechanisms for Protection and Enforcement of Human Rights in Islam". The later chapters consider the hotly debated issues concerning criminal punishment under Islamic law and women's rights, terrorism, jihad, freedom of religion, apostasy and blasphemy from an Islamic law perspective.

This work is designed to present the three aspects of human rights law in a clear and accessible fashion, addressing a number of key questions. Although structured to form a coherent exposition of human rights law, each chapter can be read as a self-contained paper, reflecting the distinct

perspective of its contributor(s). It aims to be a resource of value to all those interested in exploring and studying human rights law.

I am greatly indebted to all those who so readily agreed to contribute chapters to this work. My sincere appreciation also goes to those at Sweet & Maxwell Asia for their excellent job done. It is hoped that this volume will encourage debate and dialogue on human rights law, be that international, Malaysian or Islamic.

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Chapter Ten

Women's Rights and the Impact of CEDAW

Nora Abdul Hak

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (hereinafter "the Convention" or "CEDAW") was adopted by the United Nations with the aim of integrating the UN human rights system with an instrument specifically designed to eliminate any kind of discrimination against women. Prior to CEDAW, in the 1970s, there were treaties that offered protection of civil and political rights, as well as of economic, social, and cultural rights, to every individual without distinction based on sex. However, these treaties were ineffective in promoting the rights of women. It was claimed that the application of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and also of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) did not tackle in a significant way the *de facto* discrimination suffered by women, despite the obligation imposed upon State Parties to guarantee the codified rights and freedom for both women and men. Furthermore, the Human Rights Committee that monitors the implementation of the ICCPR in performing its functions rarely examined the situation of women. The Committee mainly concentrated on the laws, rather than on the practices and customs which were the main sources of women's discrimination. Thus, this chapter discusses the relevant Articles of the Convention which are included with the aim of protecting the rights of women. Special focus of the discussion is on the issues of employment and workplace, family matters, violence against women and women trafficking. Legal effects of reservations to CEDAW and the enforcement mechanisms will also be deliberated.

10.2 WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

One of the gifts of Islam 14 centuries ago was the liberation of women from what they were before the arrival of Islam. With the dimming of the lights of Islam in the 19th and 20th centuries, not much of this knowledge