

## **PHILIPPINE MAGNA CARTA OF WOMEN: THE "BILL OF RIGHTS" OF FILIPINO WOMEN**

Presented by:

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### **PEACEFUL DYNAMICS OF CHANGE**

The Philippines may have lost, as observed by experts, much of its Asian cultural identity to Western socio-cultural, religious, and political influences, but gained, as also observed and demonstrated, responsive political leadership and stable political institutions and apparently lesser cultural rigidity and non-violent interplay of individual and group stakeholders for a cause.

These have combined to both enshrine and institutionalize gender equality and women's empowerment particularly with the enactment of Republic Act No. 9710, or the Magna Carta of Women on 14 August 2009.

### **THE MAGNA CARTA OF WOMEN**

The signing into law of Republic Act 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women by Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the second woman President of the Philippines, the first being the well-loved "icon of democracy" and late President Cory Aquino, caps the eighth (8) year of the continuing quest for gender equality and women's empowerment since the filing of the bill in the bicameral Philippine Legislature and seventy (70) years since the suffrage movement in the 1920s which secured women's right to vote in the Philippines since 1937.

It may have been a long and challenging quest for gender equality and women's empowerment. But it clearly demonstrates the effective dynamics of a responsive Philippine leadership and forceful but peaceful influence of individual and group stakeholders in Philippine Government decision-making.

It was indeed a historical and momentous victory for both the leadership and various stakeholders. It was also a decisive victory for Filipino women, who like many other women elsewhere around the world, have been marginalized in different degrees of gravity, in terms of gender equality and empowerment.

Fittingly signed into law, the Magna Carta of Women highlights the Philippine Government's fifteen (15) years of dedicated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and translates into a national law the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly.

The Magna Carta of Women is the Philippine "Bill of Rights" for Filipino Women as CEDAW is the "international women's bill of rights." As one Philippine Senate lady senator aptly said, the Magna Carta of Women is a comprehensive law that guarantees and recognizes women's basic rights.

R.A. 9710 seeks to eliminate discrimination against women by recognizing, protecting, fulfilling and promoting the rights of Filipino women. These rights include all rights in the Philippine Constitution and those rights recognized under the international instruments signed and ratified by the Philippine Government.

Among these rights are:

- \* 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
- \* Equal access and elimination of discrimination against women in education, scholarships and training
- \* Equal participation in sports
- \* Non-discrimination in employment in the field of military, police, and other similar services
- \* Non-Discriminatory and non-derogatory portrayal of women in media and film
- \* Comprehensive health services and health information and education
- \* Leave benefits
- \* Equal rights in all matters related to marriage and family relations

The Magna Carta of Women also guarantees the civil, political and economic rights of women in the marginalized sectors

The law also renames the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) as the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) with stronger and wider authority and coverage.

R.A. 9710 also mandates the Department of Labor and Employment, and the Department of Social Services and Development to help strengthen Philippine foreign posts' programs for the delivery of services to women migrant workers.

## **FACILITATING/INSPIRING/ENABLING FACTORS**

1. Responsiveness and political will of leaders particularly the President and those in Congress to changes and developments
2. Well-defined, stable and institutionalized decision-making processes and political leadership both local and national who are directly elected by the people. Even appointive officials are appointed by duly-elected leaders.
3. A basically Asian society and culture with strong influences from both East and West, and with openness and less rigidity to internal and external changes, ideas, trends and developments
4. Constitutionally-guaranteed freedom of expression and communication making mass media, pressure and lobby groups very effective in shaping and mobilizing public opinion for or against causes like gender equality and women's empowerment
5. Effective and strong support of the donor community particularly in pushing for gender equality and women's empowerment thru relevant projects and activities.

## **OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

R.A. 9710 opens full opportunities for Filipino Women in practically all endeavors including politics, economic undertakings, education, health, various services, to name just a few.

It also offers meaningful opportunities for Filipino women to be effective and equal partners and participants in national development and socio-economic upliftment.

The challenges include:

- \* Stakeholders' responsiveness in the full and effective implementation of R.A. 9710
- \* Sustaining the continuing quest for gender equality and women's empowerment
- \* Translating into action and results the provisions of the Magna Carta of Women
- \* Responsiveness and adaptiveness of national and international developments/changes
- \* Providing guidance and inspiration for other women elsewhere around the world who might find the Philippine quest for gender equality and women's empowerment worthy as a model.

Thank you and good day!