



Chief Magistrate Jenny Blokland, Magistrate John Lowndes and Sally Gearin, Barrister



Federal Magistrate Janet Terry addresses the Court



Justice Dean Mildren RFD, Eileen Terrill and Allison Robertson



Katarzyna Rutkowska, Diana Dibden and Kris Norrington

Book Review

The No-Nonsense Guide to Human Rights

REVIEW BY PAULA GERBER, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, CASTAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS LAW, MONASH UNIVERSITY

As books on human rights proliferate, this slim volume stands out as a sensibly condensed guide on the subject, reducing such iconic works as Steiner & Alston's *International Human Rights in Context* to readable proportions.

In tracing the historic development of human rights, the authors note that they existed long before they were recognised by international law in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In particular, the authors identify historical examples of human rights principles in all cultures and religions, taking the reader back to the contributions of the ancient Greek philosophers, Aquinas, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson and Karl Marx.

In such a compact book as this, one would not be surprised to find that the authors have shied away from difficult and complex issues, but this is not the case. Problems that plague human rights discourse, such as universality versus cultural relativism, and whether human rights should be sacrificed for security, are addressed. One of the attractions of this volume is that it is inter-disciplinary – it is about human rights, not just human rights law. Thus Chapter five begins with the observation that "Law is not the only, or

even the most important means to assert rights and seek redress for their violation". This chapter then explores non-legal avenues that victims of human rights abuses can pursue, including an analysis of the part played by civil society, truth commissions, ombudsmen and national human rights institutions. The authors also address the powerful role that human rights education can play in building a culture of human rights.

While this scholarly volume does not claim to add anything new to the existing literature, it is by far the best condensed summation of the modern human rights movement anywhere. In addition, the foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu reflecting on the human rights struggles of his South Africa makes moving reading. With human rights legislation in place in the ACT and Victoria, and the current proposal to introduce a Federal Human Rights Act, there is a growing need for awareness and understanding of human rights. This book will be a useful tool in that quest for greater knowledge.

Olivia Ball and Paul Gready, The No-Nonsense Guide to Human Rights, 2006, New Internationalist Publications Ltd, paperback \$25.