

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1. Introduction | |
| 2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) | |
| 3. Convention on the Suppression of Traffic of Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949) | |
| 4. Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952) | |
| 5. Convention on Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work Of Equal value (1953) | |
| 6. Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (1958) | |
| 7. Declaration on the Rights of the child (1959) | |
| 8. Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1964) | |
| 9 Recommendation on the Consent to Marriage Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1965) | |
| 10. Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1967) | |
| 11. Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974) | |
| 12. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976) | |
| 13. Optional Protocol on International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976) | |
| 14.. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976) | 69 |
| 15. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) | 83 |
| 16. Optional Protocol to Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (2000) | 95 |
| 17. Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) | 101 |
| 18 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1986) | 113 |
| 19. Protocol to the African Charter (1995) | 126 |
| 20. Declaration on Social and Legal Principles (1986) | 137 |
| 21. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) | 141 |
| 22. Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993) | 157 |
| 23. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) | 179 |
| 24. International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (1994) | 183 |
| 25. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action(1995) | 205 |
| 26. Abridged Version of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) | 211 |
| 27. Backgroup document No. 2: The UN Declaration on Human Rights defenders (1998) | 231 |
| 28. African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999) | 241 |

Introduction

The purpose of this compilation is to provide human rights activists, legal practitioners, lecturers, students and the general public with a collection of human rights Treaties, Declarations, Recommendations and final documents of major world conferences dealing with women's rights under one cover as a reference material. We are mindful of the difficulty in accessing human rights documents particularly in a country where the majority does not have access to the internet. This book, it is hoped, will solve the problem of dearth of literature on human rights in Nigeria.

Treaties, also referred to as Conventions and Covenants, are agreements between two or more states in written form and governed by international law, whether embodied in a single instrument or in two or more related instruments. Treaties are binding on States Parties that have ratified and acceded to them and a State may not plead its domestic law as the reason for its failure to fulfil its obligations under the Treaty. On the other hand, Declarations and Recommendations, as well as Guidelines do not have the binding legal force of a Treaty although they are of strong persuasive authority in their respective subjects. They are “broadly accepted” principles of international law and in many cases reflect the first attempt to codify customary international law before its final evolution into a Treaty. In most cases, some of the standards in this category are adopted or proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly where most nations of the world are represented and this indicates wide acceptability. In some cases, they are adopted at Special Meetings of the Specialised Agencies like the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural organisation (UNESCO), International Labour Organisation etc. at which the interest of most states are represented.

The concept of human rights and human rights law is dynamic in nature. Although a range of fundamental human rights has already been legally recognized in the Bill of Rights, existing rights are being more broadly interpreted and additional rights are being proposed and accepted by the United Nations. It is this dynamism that makes human rights a potentially powerful tool for promoting social justice and the dignity of all people. Human rights thus acquires new meaning and dimension at different points in history as oppressed groups demand recognition of their rights and new condition give rise to the need for new protections. It is on the basis of this that women all over the world launched an unprecedented international movement for the recognition of women's human rights as an integral part of human rights.

They mobilised and organised themselves to call for recognition of their rights. Several meetings and consultations were held around the world to chart a course for what came to be known as the women's liberation movement. The International Council of Women was set up towards the end of the nineteenth century. 66 American and 8 European women attended its first and founding convention, held in Washington in 1888 where participants

decided to implement a plan to put an end to the oppression of women. Some 5000 women participated in the second meeting, which took place in London in 1899. Women workers were beginning to organise movements demanding better working conditions. Other social movements followed.

Political rights for women, especially the right to vote, was a major issue and is still is. In the United Kingdom and United States, two organisations; the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association, were founded to work towards attaining this right for women. The women followed this up with an intense and aggressive campaign for equal participation of women in politics. Nevertheless, it was in new Zealand that women were first granted the right to vote, in 1893, followed by Australia in 1902, Finland in 1906 and Norway in 1913. When the United Nations was founded in 1945, only 30 of its 51 Member States accorded women the same voting rights as men.

The League of Nations which was founded in 1919 and officially dissolved in 1946, did not really function after 1939. It however, adopted some instruments dealing with the protection of women such as the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children of 1921. The first international convention relating to the protection of women was adopted at the beginning of the twentieth century: the International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Trade of May 4, 1910.

As a result of the dynamic activities of women, the United Nations and its specialised agencies engaged from inception, in the promotion and protection of the rights of women. The Charter of the United Nations, which reaffirms "... faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women ...", was the first international instrument to define equal rights for men and women in precise terms. At its first session in 1946, the General Assembly adopted resolution 56(1) recommending that all Member States which had not already accorded women voting rights adopt measures to grant women those rights. The same year, the Economic and Social Council set up the Commission on the Status of Women to report and make recommendations on the promotion of the human rights of women and to recommend measures to achieve equal rights for men and women. That same year, the United Nations created in its secretariat the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the main objectives of which are to improve the status of women world-wide and ensure the effective achievement of equality between men and women.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, enshrines the principle of equality between women and men and prohibits discrimination against women. Other United Nations standard-setting instruments which prohibit discrimination against women are Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1952 which ensures equality of political rights between women and men; Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women 1967 which provides that discrimination against women "is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an

offence against human dignity”; Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women 1979 which represents a progressive development in human rights, prohibits discrimination against women because it not only reaffirms standards already embodied in other conventions and declarations, it adds dimensions and principles that are both significant and new; and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women which identifies violence against women as an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace, a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women, and a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over women.

To raise public awareness and to encourage actions designed to eliminate discrimination against women, the United Nations, in 1972, proclaimed 1975 the International Women's Year with a Policy of promoting equality, development and peace in the world. The World Conference of the International Women's Year held that year in Mexico City adopted the Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace and the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year. The Plan recommended that Governments ensure the equality of women and men before the law, and also equality of opportunities in education, training and employment. Thereafter the period 1975-1985 was declared United Nations Decade for women in recognition of the fact that women comprising approximately 50% of the world's population have been marginalized and have not participated in social, political and economic development to an optimal level. The decade was to be used to remedy the wrongs and injustice of the past and concrete steps taken to bring women into the mainstream of development.

Ten years later, the World Conference charged to examine and evaluate the results of the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held in Nairobi, Kenya and brought the decade to a close. The conference adopted the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, a basic tenet of which was that the elimination of all forms of inequality between men and women would be an essential contribution to strengthening peace and security.

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing China in 1995 and adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reaffirming the determination of participating governments to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for women in the interest of all humanity, accelerate the implementation of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and eliminate any obstacles to the active and equal participation of women in the decision-making process in all spheres of life. In 1990, the World Summit for Children was held in New York. The Conference issued the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, which states that “strengthening the role of women in general and ensuring their equal rights will be to the advantage of the world's children” and stresses that “girls must be given equal treatment and opportunities from the very beginning...”. The UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, 1992 recognised women's multiple role in

development and environmental protection. This was followed by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna Austria in 1993. The Conference reaffirmed that all human rights are universal, indivisible, inter-dependent and interrelated and that the human rights of women are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of universal human rights. It called for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the eradication of all forms of violence against women.

The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 stressed that reinforcing the capacity for action and the autonomy of women was a prerequisite for sustainable development and reaffirmed the right of women to control their own fertility. In 1995, the World Summit on Social Development Copenhagen drew attention to the central role of women in development, women's social issues and the discriminatory practices that prevented their full participation in society. The second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat 11) in Istanbul in 1996 adopted the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, in which governments pledged to redouble their efforts to eradicate poverty and discrimination and to ensure the participation on the basis of equality of women and men in all spheres of society. The Oslo conference on Child Labour in Oslo in 1997 recalled the role played by women in the eradication of child labour and deplored the continuing discrimination against girls.

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The beginning of the 20 Century began with review meetings to appraise and assess the level of implementation of some of these documents by participating governments. The Beijing +5 and Beijing +10 meetings organised by the Commission on the Status of Women held in 2000 and 2005 are cases in point.

The treaties, declarations etc. contained in this book are arranged in a chronological order according to the date of coming into force of the instrument. The book does not pretend to be exhaustive. For obvious reasons we are not able to include all the existing regional instruments. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and African Charter on the Rights of the Child are the only regional instruments included therein.

We hope that by this publication we have contributed in no little to the advancement of women's human rights. We also hope that the book will be useful to all those women and men who are committed to the cause of the human rights of women and who are actively pursuing the cause.

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