

**HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION**



HUMAN RIGHTS
a handbook

Australian Government Publishing Service
Canberra 1983

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ISBN 0 644 02239 6

This booklet was prepared as course material for the Human Rights Commission. It was written within the Commission by Dr Ralph Pettman.

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Design: Christopher Storey

Also in this series

Human Rights for Humankind: Racism, published 1983

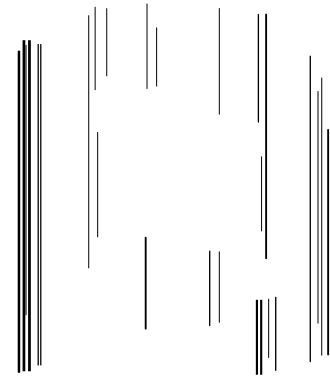
Human Rights for Humankind: Sexism, published 1984

Printed by Watson Ferguson & Co., Brisbane

What are human rights?

HUMAN RIGHTS

Your name is
Maria. You are a journalist. You
wrote a news story which **made the**
President very angry. The **next day**
the police broke into your **home and**
you were taken away. You **were**
beaten and put in a room **alone**. No
one knows where you **are**. You **have**
been there for six months.



our Your name is
Sha Shanti. You are 10 years old. Your legs
are crippled because when you were
very young you had polio. You have to work
in a factory the whole day and you are
tired all the time. You have never been
to school.



Your name is Ben.

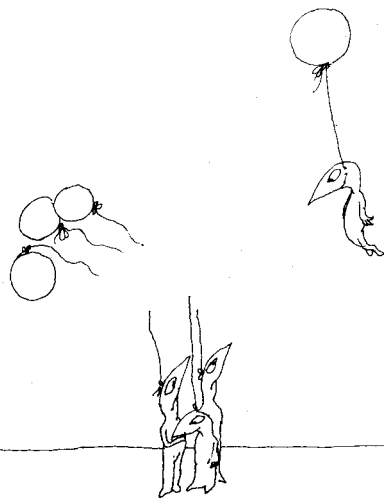
Your parents have sent you to buy
some groceries at the new store that
has just opened around the corner.

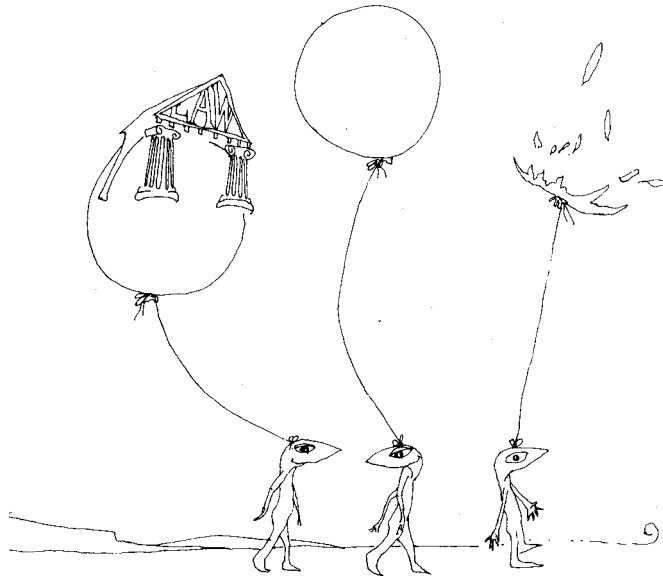
The manager — a little man with a

ginger moustache — sees you coming
in and shouts at you. He says he
does not serve people like you. 'Get
out', he yells. You leave very upset.
You do not know what you have
done wrong. Your skin is brown.



There is some-
thing each of these different people
don't have. They don't have their
human rights.





legal

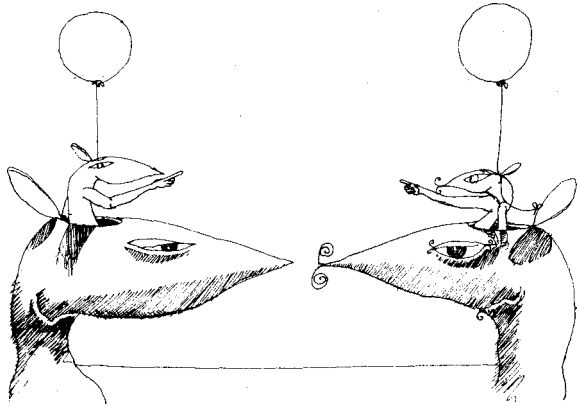
moral

practical

Human rights

Legal (to do with a country's laws)	Moral (to do with what feels right and wrong)	Practical (to do with what actually happens)
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What are human rights? The general answer has three aspects: a moral one, a legal one and a practical one.



there is something about us that always seems the same

Now think for a

moment about what you are. There are many answers you might give, but an obvious one might be: 'I am a human being'. There are many different kinds of human being. As well as these differences, however, there is something about us all that is the same.

Most people

agree there are some things it is *right*

to give others (or do for them) because they *are* human beings. Because of

our sameness, this is so for everyone.

Whatever colour, shape or sex we

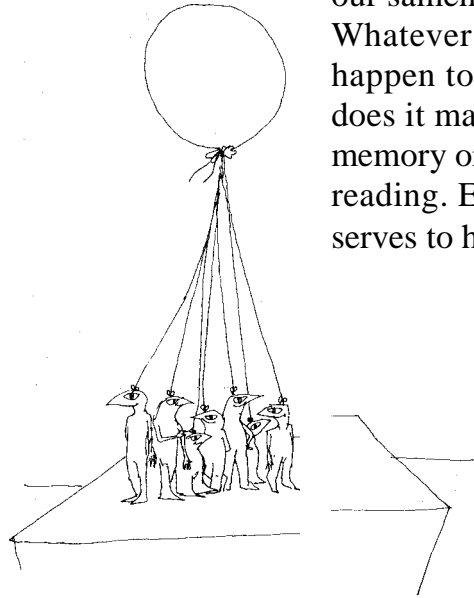
happen to be does not matter. Nor

does it matter if we have a good

memory or not, or prefer sport to

reading. Everybody everywhere de-

serves to have or get their *rights*.



Thinking or feeling

about the rightness and wrongness of the things we do is called *morality*. To say there are 'human rights', then, is to say first of all there are *moral* rights. It is to say that there are things it seems wrong to do to anybody, ever.

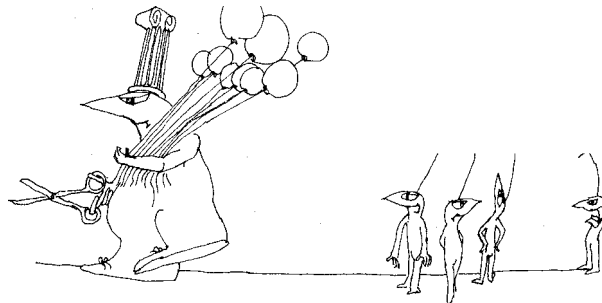
Sometimes these

thoughts and feelings about right and wrong are made into *laws*. When this happens, human rights become *legal* rights. Politicians or judges make a decision that becomes a law. Or statesmen make an agreement that a number of governments promise to obey.



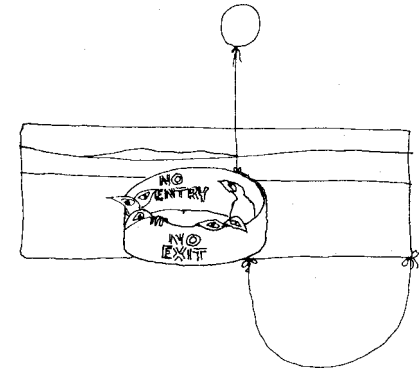
But laws are not

always obeyed. Governments do not always do what they say they will. So, as well as looking at human rights as *moral* feelings, and as *laws*, we have to look at whether or not people actually get their rights. In those countries where rights have been made into laws, we need to find out if they are being put into *practice*. We should ask what the *practical* reality happens to be.





This is all very general, so far. What about human rights *in particular*? What does a human being deserve just because he or she is a human being — like yourself? What would you actually put in a *list* of human rights, if you were asked to make one up for yourself?

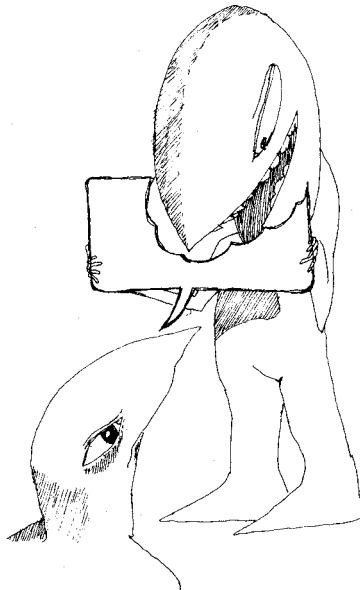


You may not

know how it feels not to have enough food. You may not know what it is like not to have somewhere to live.

You may never have been in a

country where people cannot vote for the government of their choice, and cannot say what they like about politics without being put in prison. But you can still imagine these things.

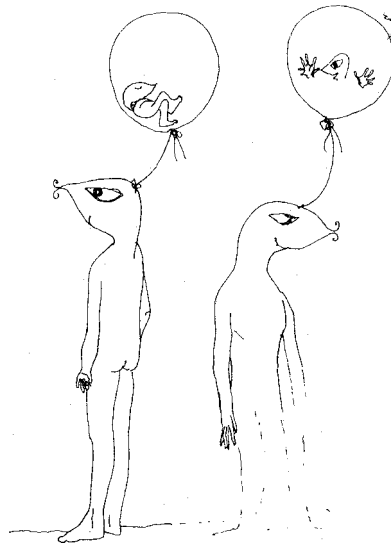


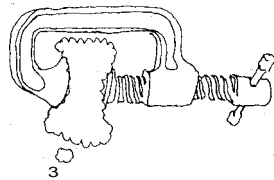
have work to do and to have a family. Everybody about, to be different and to say most of what he or she likes, without fear.

Everybody needs

to eat, and have a home. Everybody deserves a chance to be educated, to

should be able to move





W

ithout such

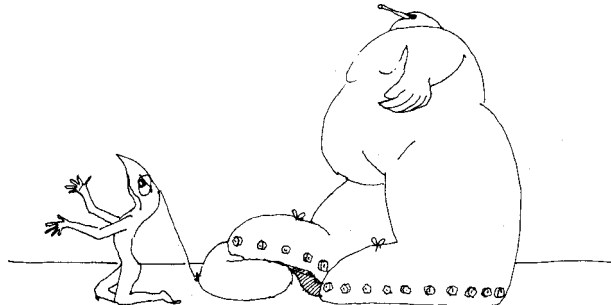
things, no one is likely to lead a very full or happy life.

It is needs and wants and characteristics like these that help us to work out lists of human rights. They help us to decide what our particular human rights happen to be.

Forty years ago, at the end of World War II, the countries that had won that huge war were wondering how to arrange world affairs. They met together and decided to start a United Nations. Because of the war and all the suffering and destruction, many people wanted to build a better world, which is why one of the first things the United Nations did was to make a list of human rights and to write them down for all people to read and to use.

This was called the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. It had thirty different Articles in it. It set out the basic rights for everyone in the world, whatever their colour, sex, language or religion, and whatever country they came from (indeed, one of the Articles said that everyone be allowed to *have* a country to come from).

'Universal' means
'something belonging to
everybody in the world'.
A 'declaration' is a
formal written
announcement.
An 'article' is a part of a
declaration.

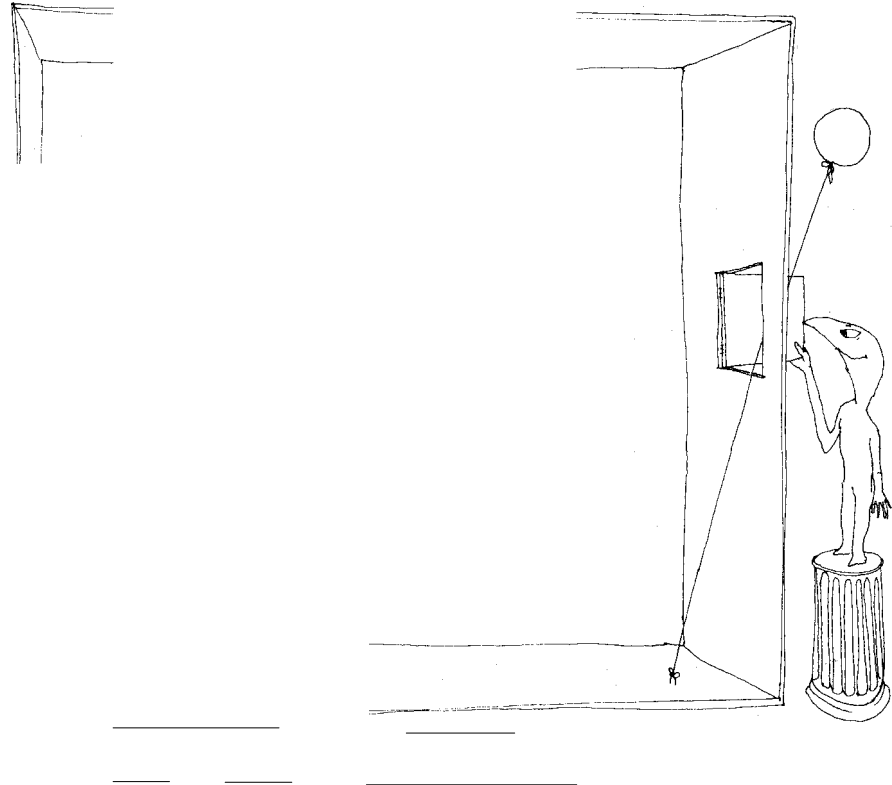


In writing down this Universal Declaration, the United Nations was saying: whether governments make these rights into laws or not, they are important anyway. Everybody everywhere ought to know about them and ought to have or get them.

Not all countries have made all of them into laws. But the idea of human rights has been very important in world affairs ever since.



The story did not
stop there, however. The United
Nations has made more lists since.
One of these is called:



A 'covenant' is a legal agreement.

*the International Covenant on
Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights*

Another is called:
*the International Covenant on
Civil and Political Rights*

T here is also:

the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

A 'convention' is an agreement.

the Declaration of the Rights of the Child

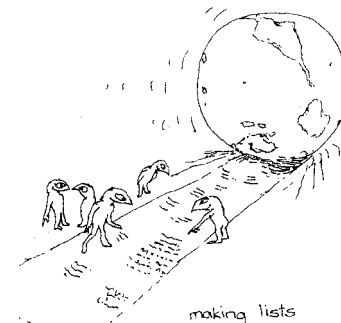
the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons

the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons

the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

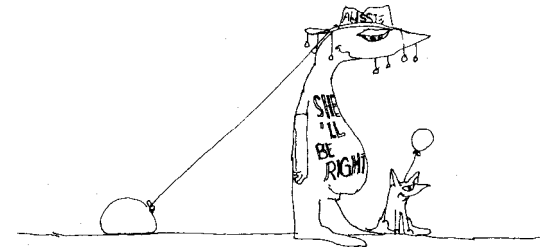
the Convention against Discrimination in Education

And there have been others. The words of the Universal Declaration are very general. These other lists try to be more detailed. They try to meet the special needs of particular groups of people (like children).



Human rights in Australia

What about Australia? This is a rich country, where most people are well fed. We **have** houses, schools, hospitals **and** many other services. We **think of ourselves** as free and we **like to believe that** these good things **are there for all** Australians and **that everybody gets** his or her human rights.



AIM: A1WT fro6TrzALIA

We like to think, in other words, that everyone who lives here gets **a fair go**.



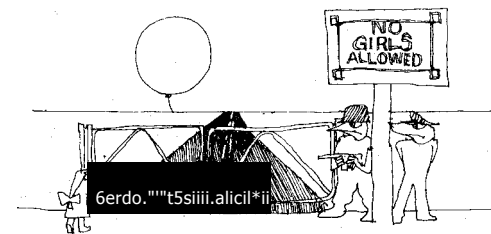
Human rights do not just happen.
They have to be made to happen.

Well, they don't.

Laws have to be passed and they have to be used. For example: the Aboriginal people of Australia have often found it very hard to get the kind of things they ought, as human beings, to have. The story is the same for many people who came to live here after World War II, for many poor and disabled people, and many women. Their lives are nowhere near as full and as happy as they ought to be.

How do you think anyone would feel if they were not allowed to live a normal life because they or their parents came from another country? How would you feel if you were always treated

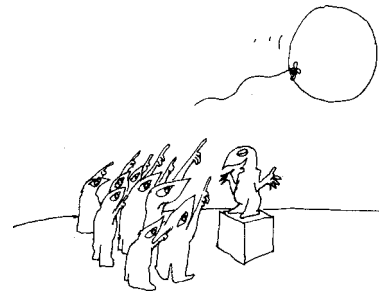
differently because your skin was a colour that those around you did not like? How would you feel if, just because you were a girl, there were things you were not expected to do, even though you knew you could do them and most boys already did?



Changing ideas
about what is right, and changing the
laws that go with them, can take a

long time. People have to argue
against what they believe to be

wrong.



And the arguments go on. They have not stopped. It is up to us to take part in them if more people (not just here, but in other places too — people like Maria, like Shanti, like Ben) are finally to get their human rights.



The Human Rights Commission

A 'commission' is a group of people given the power to do special things.

In 1981, the Australian Government passed the Human Rights Commission Act. This said that all Commonwealth laws and those in the Australian Capital Territory (but not those of the States or the Northern Territory) should abide by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and by three of the Declarations listed on page 17.

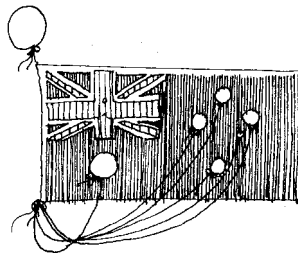


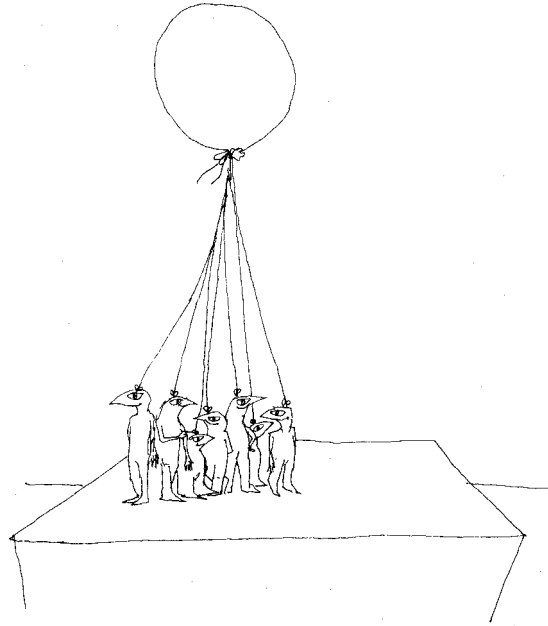
The Human

Rights Commission Act has brought together a group of people named the Human Rights Commission. This has an office in Canberra, and other offices in other cities. Its job is to see that Australians know about all these rights — and that everybody gets them. Thus:

anyone in Australia who thinks he or she is not getting the human rights he or she is entitled to, or those in Australia who believe they have been treated badly because of their race, colour, national or ethnic background

can complain to the Human Rights Commission. Someone will look into their complaints for them, and see what can be done.



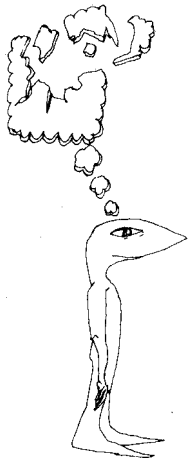


It is the Commission's job also to study the ways in which the *idea* of human rights can be used in Australia to make our lives better.

It is the Commission's job to find out how the idea of human rights can best be taught to students in universities and schools. The more people come to know about human rights (what they mean and why they are important) the better.



One day,
perhaps, everyone everywhere will
get a fair go.



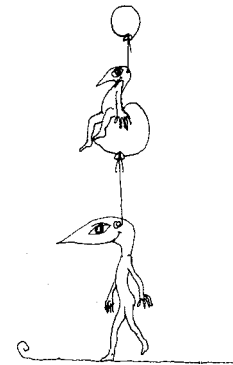
Note for students

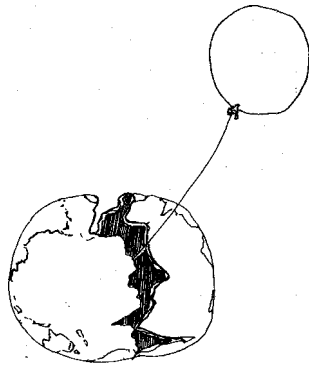
Do discuss human rights with your parents and teachers. They can help explain the different words and ideas, and tell you more about what they mean.

Note for teachers

This booklet has been prepared by the Human Rights Commission as part of a course on human rights. Do write for further details:

Human Rights Commission
P. O. Box 629
Canberra City, A. C. T. 2601





R83/1526 Cat. No. 84 0925 6

