



POSITION PAPER

IN SUPPORT OF THE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE BILL

Reproductive health is a basic human right and it is the obligation of the government to protect and facilitate the enjoyment of this right.

Under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which the Philippines is a state-party, the government should:

- o Ensure access to specific educational information to help ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning (Article 10 (h));
- o Take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning (Article 12(1));
- o Ensure, on the basis of equality of men and women, the same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights (Article 16 (1) e).

The Philippine government is not only remiss in promoting the reproductive health and rights, particularly of women, but also places barriers to the full attainment of this entitlement with the lack of an integrated national policy on reproductive health.

SALIGAN calls for the enactment of a law on reproductive health. It supports the Reproductive Health Care Bill.

The Reproductive Health Care Bill upholds the principle that individuals and couples have the right to be fully in charge of their reproductive decisions.

It guarantees the freedom of choice of every person over their own bodies – whether or not they want to have children, how many children they will have and the space between their births.

It promotes the right of women to reproductive self-determination by ensuring that there is an enabling environment where she can make informed decisions on how she can best ensure her overall reproductive health and that of her family, without coercion or fear.

The Reproductive Health Care Bill ensures universal access to reproductive health services and information.

Filipinos - adults and young, single and married, Catholics and non-Catholics - have been denied of access to adequate information on reproductive health and regular and timely dispensation of reproductive health care services as the government only provides “Catholic Church-approved reproductive health services and information.” This has resulted in continuing high incidences of unwanted and unsafe pregnancies, illegal abortions, unacceptable maternal deaths and overpopulation.

The bill will provide timely, complete and accurate information on reproductive health as well as ready access to safe, adequate and affordable reproductive health care services. It provides penalties to those who would withhold information on reproductive health or would fail to perform or deliver reproductive health services. It provides capability-building to barangay health workers who are at the forefront of delivering the basic health services. It mandates local government units to appropriate funds for reproductive health services.

Access to medically-safe and legal natural and modern family planning methods will: (1) mitigate the adverse health consequences of high fertility on mothers and children; (2) promote and protect the reproductive health rights of all Filipinos; and (3) reduce unwanted pregnancy and accidental parenthood.

The bill will save the lives of mothers and children. It will save the future of youth. It will help couples become truly responsible parents

who can concentrate more on providing a stable, happy home life for their children or those couples who are not yet ready to become parents or those who choose not to be a parent at all.

The Reproductive Health Care Bill ensures an effective reproductive health education.

The bill does not only instill consciousness of freedom of choice but responsible exercise of one's rights.

The bill provides for a mandatory reproductive health and sexuality education in our formal education system. While it is imperative that the parents and adult members of the family should initiate this education; however, it is a fact that most parents are remiss in this obligation or cannot simply perform such because they are overseas workers.

By ensuring an effective reproductive health education, young people will be provided with information and skills about taking care of their reproductive and sexual health, and will help them make sound decisions now and in the future.

According to the United Nations Population Fund: "It has been repeatedly shown that reproductive health education leads to responsible behavior, higher levels of abstinence, later initiation of sexuality, higher use of contraception, and fewer sexual partners. These good effects are even greater when parents can talk honestly with their children about sexual and reproductive matters."

The Reproductive Health Care Bill promotes population management in order to achieve social and economic development.

The gap between the number of families who would like to limit family size and the number who have access to sufficient information and services to do so have risen among the poor majority of Filipinos. It is these children of the poor who are unlikely to finish elementary school, or go to high school or develop technical or professional skills for a productive life.

Population management achieved through the enhancement of reproductive health is fundamental to improving human welfare, reducing poverty and promoting economic growth.

The bill will manage an unbridled population growth that hinders socioeconomic development by establishing an integrated national policy on population management.

The bill does not legalize abortion nor does it promote sexual promiscuity.

The bill continues to proscribe abortion, which is a crime under the Revised Penal Code. However, when abortion is resorted to, despite the prohibition, there is a need to manage post-abortion complications in a humane and compassionate manner. The patient should not be suffered to die due to her desperation.

Neither does the bill encourage abortion. On the contrary, the correct and consistent use of contraceptives prevents unwanted, unplanned and mistimed pregnancies, which are the very pregnancies that are terminated through abortion. Planned pregnancies foreclose intentional abortion.

Reproductive health and sexuality education among the young people will not breed "sex maniacs" and promote sexual promiscuity. Studies by the UN and countries which have youth sexuality education document the following beneficial results: (1) proper sexual values are promoted; (2) early initiation to sexual relations is delayed; (3) abstinence before marriage is encouraged; (4) multiple sex partners is avoided; and (5) spread of STDs is prevented.

The bill is not about abortion or sexual promiscuity. It is not an issue of religion nor a question of when does life begins.

It is about health and rights. It is about promoting and protecting the basic human right to health and reproductive self-determination.

In whatever way it may be worded as an advocacy strategy so long as the principles above described are included

therein, SALIGAN calls for the re-filing of the Reproductive Health Care Bill in the 14th Congress.