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Reproductive rights emerge as key issue in Philippine presidential election

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Population management and reproductive health are emerging as key issues in the upcoming elections in the Philippines.

Presidential candidate Noynoy Aquino, son of the late Philippine Presisent Corazón "Cory" Aquino, has come out in support of the Reproductive Health Bill [1], now before the Philippine Congress. The Catholic Philippine hierarchy opposes the bill, which promotes information and access "to both natural and modern family planning methods that are medically safe and legally permissible."

Abortion is illegal in the Philippines.

The presidential election will be held May, 10, 2010.

The fertility rate [2] of Filipina women stands at 3.3 children, even though four out of 10 women say they prefer to have only two children, a Philippine survey recently revealed.

The Philippines population is projected to reach 94 million this year, up by more than five million from the 2007 census count. Many see economic development in that nation as dependent on curbing a rapidly rising demographics.

Meanwhile, the Philippine bishops have consistently opposed population control programs. As a result, the government is reluctant to fund family planning schemes.

With rapid population growth, the issue or reproductive health and rights is unlikely to go away any time in the near future.

Highlighting the conflict between prominent Philippine lay Catholics and their church hierarchy, Jan. 15, Loida Nicolas-Lewis, who has since the death of her husband, African-American financier Reginald Lewis, emerged as an international business leader in her own right, was inducted [3]as the sixth ?Eminent Person? to join the Manila-based Forum for Family Planning and Development. The Forum is a non-government organization devoted to advocating for more enlightened policies and programs on population and reproductive health.

In her acceptance speech, Nicolas-Lewis demonstrated her commitment to her advocacy for reproductive health rights stems from her own personal experience and background.

?I am here because I believe in the beauty and primacy of love between a man and a woman, the poetry and the mystical symbolism of the physical union between husband and wife,? she said.

Therefore, she added, ?I believe that no one should be in the matrimonial bedroom, not even the Holy Father the Pope, when the man and the woman express their love for each other in that most intimate expression of love?their physical union.? This is why, she said, ?the ultimate decision of how many children the couple should have remains between the husband and wife, because they alone know how best to maintain the harmony and the love they have for one another and their children.?

Distinguishing between ?natural? and ?artificial? methods, she said, merely divides ?what is really a unified act?the act of love that during a woman?s child-bearing years could produce a child in her womb, and once past those years, still could produce pleasure for the couple??

She also asserted the right of women to make informed choices about their bodies and reproductive lives, reasoning that ?since it is the woman who bears the fetus in her womb, I believe that she more than the man has the absolute right to know how best to control her reproductive powers, and decide how many children she should bear, during that act of procreation, by using those methods that are helpful and healthful to her well-being.?

Speaking from her own life experience, Nicolas-Lewis declared: ?I believe that the natural method is unnatural.?

Last November, Nicolas-Lewis joined the NCR Board of Directors.

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[1] http://jlp-law.com/blog/reproductive-health-bill-fact-sheet-and-explanatory-note/
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