NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Philippines archbishop: Spend to stop child labor, not on condoms

N.J. Viehland | Jul. 3, 2012 NCR Today

MANILA, Philippines -- The president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines on Sunday urged the government [1] to spend the money allocated for contraceptives on programs to curb high incidence of child labor in the Philippines instead.

Interviewed over church radio Veritas 846, Archbishop Jose Palma of Cebu said instead of buying condoms, the government must use the funds to provide "worthy programs" that would employ parents of working children. He pointed to increased use of child labor [2] as a "more urgent" issue than birth control.

Palma referred to reports released last week of preliminary results of the 2011 Survey on Children in the Philippines [3], conducted by the National Statistics Office with support of the International Labor organization and the US Department of Labor. The survey report estimated about 5.5 million of the 29 million Filipino children ages 5 to 17 are working, with about 3 million of the workers in hazardous child labor.

Many of these children are in the northern Mindanao region in the southern Philippines, where Sr. Famita Somogod serves as member of the Philippines-founded Missionary Sisters of Mary [4]. The area ranked fourth among regions with highest number of children in hazardous work in places like farms, mines, markets and streets.

Somogod, regional coordinator of Rural Missionaries of the Philippines [5] told *NCR* that in Iligan City [6], children as young as 11, encouraged by parents, leave their farm homes and elementary schooling to go with recruiters who place them as canteen servers, dish washers, market vendors and in other jobs in town centers and cities in the region.

With an annual average family income of 98,000 pesos, 39.6 percent of the population in 2009 was found [7] living in poverty. "For (child laborers and their parents), it's a matter of survival," Somogod said. Government needs to implement poverty alleviation programs for a comprehensive solution to child labor, she said.

In his radio interview, Palma said it is sad the government is implementing a "deficient" solution of funding contraceptives instead of helping the child labor problem. The archbishop said the government should use the funds for programs that would create jobs for parents so children will not need to work to augment family income.

However, Health Secretary Enrique Ona announced June 18 the department would be distributing [8] about 500 million pesos worth of condoms, birth control pills and other contraceptives this year to reduce maternal mortality rate in the country, which increased to 221 in 2011 from 162 in 2006.

To some observers [9], the new family planning initiative is an attempt to "rescue a failed family planning program with cash." The money will reportedly come from the general budget allocation of $990 million.

Citing "alarming, but not surprising" general findings of the 2011 Family Health Survey in a statement [10]

after a press briefing, Ona said the rate of mothers dying in childbirth or from pregnancy-related causes indicates how well government is able to improve the health of citizens. He blamed poor delivery of services to impoverished communities for these "highly preventable" deaths of mothers.

Aside from providing contraceptives, Ona stressed the need to pass the Reproductive Health Bill [11] and amendment of laws to help the country meet its global Millennium Development Goals [12] for reducing poverty by 2015.

Around the country, health services to people have been neglected the last 10 years, Ona said, so about 6 million women have unmet needs for modern family planning services because of the government's "limited" support for the family planning program.

His department has also reportedly allocated [8] 868 million pesos to fund health teams to communities to bring health services and 6 billion pesos to improve government-owned clinics and hospitals.

The Philippines, where about 81 percent of the 95 million people are baptized Catholics, has had a Family Planning Program [9] since the 1970s, when its population was around 40 million.

Amid stiff opposition from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, various religious and pro-life groups, reproductive health bills have been debated in the House of Representatives and the Philippines Senate. Interpellation is finished in the Senate [13] and proponent senators are looking forward to its passage around August.

Debate on House Bill 4244 [14] paused in early June and is expected to continue when plenary sessions resume this month.

While there is general agreement about the need to attend to maternal and child health care, its key proposal for funding from the government and private sector for contraceptive medicine, devices and services continue to be debated [15].

House representatives have amended the bill in the Lower House of Congress following hearings and critique, but church leaders [16] continue to reject its "international" backing, its premise of population control to solve poverty, its advocating that the government provide people the "full range" of maternal health services -- which is understood to include abortion -- and its state provision of sex education to children. It is rejected [17] as "anti-life" and for promoting a "culture of death."

The bishops are not the bill's only critics. *Philippine Star* columnist Rey Gamboa writes [18] the bill's intention to counter maternal mortality rate is not accompanied by the "right solutions," including providing maternal health for women who want to give birth in addition to pregnancy prevention.

Solutions, Gamboa says, should include providing improved birthing facilities, hiring properly trained medical professionals and paying them adequately, improving sanitation and making medicines accessible.

On his blog, Jesuit Fr. Joaquin Bernas offers his expertise [19] in constitutional law to explain legal and moral issues in the debate. He explained his view on the president's responsibility to consider common good and why the country's leader need not necessarily be defying it when he acts with respect for individual conscience of people. Bernas also cautioned against the church using the political system to push its position on reproductive health.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/01/2015 - 08:09*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/philippines-archbishop-spend-stop-child-labor-not-condoms

Links:

[1] http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/221663/church-tells-gov't-instead-of-buying-condoms-tackle-child-labor-issues
[2] http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm
[3] http://www.ilo.org/manila/info/public/pr/WCMS_184097/lang--en/index.htm
[4] http://www.cebuarchdiocese.org/directory/religious/women/active/missionary-sisters-of-mary-msm/
[5] http://www.rmp-nmr.org/index.php/humanitarian-missions/157-indigenous-schools-receive-support-from-unicef
[6] http://dioceseofiligan.com/
[7] http://www.nscb.gov.ph/ru10/statwatch/statwatch1Q2012_rs.htm
[8] http://business.inquirer.net/65955/doh-to-distribute-p500m-worth-of-pills-condoms
[9] http://www.irinnews.org/Report/95776/PHILIPPINES-Rescuing-failed-family-planning-with-cash
[10] http://www.doh.gov.ph/content/speech-health-secretary-enrique-t-ona-md-message-be-delivered-during-launch-national
[11] http://www.congress.gov.ph/download/basic_15/HB04244.pdf
[12] http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview.html
[13] http://www.rappler.com/nation/6542-a-step-forward-for-rh-bill
[14] http://www.plcpd.com/rh-bill/updates-on-hb4244-rh-bill-plenary-debates/
[15] http://www.filippiinit-seura.fi/debatedrhbill.html
[16] http://cbcpforlife.com/?p=901
[17] http://cbcponline.net/v2/?p=1151
[18] http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=820612&publicationSubCategoryId=66
[19] http://fatherbernasblogs.blogspot.com/2011/03/issues-arising-from-rh-bills.html