

# Philippines: Reproductive Health and the Church's Reaction to the President's stand

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### KAISA KA Says President Aquino Should Not Buckle amid Pressure on RH

While the leaders of the Catholic Church are attacking President Aquino for his stand on birth control, we in the feminist organization KAISA KA are glad and supportive of his stand especially if he would make it very clear that his family planning perspective is anchored on reproductive health, rights and sustainable human development.

The Catholic leaders have long been opposing artificial methods of contraception because according to them, these amount to abortion. Their opposition is relentless and it has become absurd even to many Catholics especially because the mere use of condoms by married couples has become sinful.

Serious studies show that the unavailability of other methods of birth control drive many women to resort to abortion that are usually unsafe. But the male-dominated leadership of the church refuse to see this and even the fact that 170 out of 100,000 Filipino women die during childbirth as government allocation for health has become too small to support the needs of a very big poor population.

Therefore, as bishops and priests are expected to exhort the members of their church to follow their own law, i.e., the 1930 Papal Encyclical, they must be careful not to overstep in the domain of governance. We should not allow them to throw their weight around because the government is supposed to give attention to the whole nation's wellbeing, including health.

Moreover, as KAISA KA agrees that the burgeoning population exacerbates poverty, it criticizes some studies and even previous reproductive health bills that consider the absence of a birth control program or of a reproductive health law as the root cause of poverty in the country. KAISA KA believes that while government should take population management as a serious responsibility, it should not use the phrase reproductive health to mask population control or say that a reproductive health law is its response to the wide spread problem of poverty. This formulation merely blurs the real root of the problem: the acute unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity and severe fiscal and resource mismanagement, an outcome of the neocolonial nature of Philippine society that hinges on an export oriented, import dependent and debt driven economy.

It is encouraging that manifestly improved reproductive health bills have been filed both in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. If people would only open their minds, they would see how the enactment of a genuine reproductive health law could help empower women, improve maternal health as well as that of children and of the nation in general.

KAISA KA and the numerous women working for women empowerment are ready to go to the streets

to back reproductive health.

**Kaisa Ka**

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**P.S.**

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