

Philippines: Welga ng Kababaihan urges lawmakers to pass Reproductive Health Bill

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A day before several lawmakers deliver their respective sponsorship speeches on the controversial bill promoting the use of both artificial and natural means of family planning, among others, a network of more than 50 non-government and people's organizations advocating women's and people's rights today urged other members of the House of Representatives to affirm women's right to reproductive self-determination, and to support the immediate passage of the Reproductive Health Bill.

The Welga ng Kababaihan, which includes the Freedom from Debt Coalition Women's Committee, stressed that it is a woman's right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to her sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

In a statement of support to House Bill 5043 or An Act Providing for a National Policy on Reproductive Health, Responsible Parenthood and Population Development, the group said the RH Bill embodies many aspects of the principle of reproductive health as a woman's right.

Central to overall health

"The RH Bill promotes sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflects a commitment to women's social and economic well-being, and affirms the moral capacity of women and men to make sound decisions about their lives," the group said.

It added that because reproductive health is central to overall health, fundamental aspects of women's well-being are compromised when reproductive health is ignored.

"Women are placed in bondage to reproduction and biology if only 'natural family planning' is tolerated," the group stressed.

Right to Choose

"The RH Bill makes it the responsibility of the state to protect the right to choose, not to make decisions for individuals. Women's right to choose is a basic part of exercising control over their lives. The Bill provides for women to be informed and to services that will ensure women's ability to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights," the women's group said.

However, reproductive rights are only likely to be exercised effectively and responsibly by women when certain other economic and social rights and entitlements have been realized, it said.

"The conditions under which choices are made are as important as the actual content of women's choices: the right to choose is a meaningless abstraction if women are powerless to choose," the group explained.

Recognizing health complications

The group supports the RH Bill because it “recognizes the catastrophic health consequences of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.”

“Poverty is not only implicated in these deaths, it is also often its direct cause. The RH Bill acknowledges the reproductive health needs of vulnerable young and poor women and the removal of legal as well as attitudinal punitive measures against those who have undergone poorly managed abortions,” it said.

Integral to social and economic health

The RH Bill acknowledges that reproductive and sexual health is integral to social and economic health, the group said.

“Fertility control must be part of a broader program which seeks to: improve women’s health and education; provide women with productive work; promote gender equity, especially by placing equal responsibility for reproduction and child-rearing on men; and, reorient structural social, economic and development processes towards an equitable distribution of the nation’s, and the world’s, productive assets,” it said.

Exercising reproductive options

The group believes that the RH Bill affirms that human sexuality and gender relations are closely interrelated and together affect the ability of men and women to achieve and maintain sexual health and manage their reproductive lives.

“The differential power between men and women in general, and husbands and wives in particular, is a major factor in women’s ability to exercise reproductive options. Those who have most at stake in every pregnancy should be allowed a decisive voice and choice on their own behalf,” it said.

Welga ng Kababaihan

Aside from FDC Women’s Committee, members of the Welga ng Kababaihan include: AKBAYAN, Alab Katipunan, Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL), ANAWIM, Bagong Kamalayan, BUDYONG - PLKP, BUKLOD, Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP) - Kababaihan, Center for Empowerment and Resource Development (CERD), Center for Migrants Advocacy (CMA), Centro Saka Inc. (CSI), Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Asia Pacific (CATW-AP), Confederation of Independent Unions (CIU), Damayan ng mga Pilipinong Api (DAMPA), Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD), Integrated Rural Development Foundation (IRDF), International Gender and Trade Network- Asia (IGTN).

Jubilee South, Kaalagad, KABAPA, KAKAMMPI, Kalayaan - Housing, Kalayaan - Madza, KASAMA-PILIPINAS, Katipunan para sa Pagpapalaya ng Sambayanan (KALAYAAN!) - Women, Kilusang Kababaihang Mangingisda, KPML, Labor Education Research Institute (LEARN), LAKAMBINI - PAKISAMA. MAKALAYA, NGOs for Fisheries Reform (NFR), PADAYON, PAKISAMA, Pambansang Kongreso ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan(PKKK), Pambansang Tagapag-ugnay ng mga Manggagawa sa Bahay (PATAMABA) PANGISDA-KKM.

Partido ng Manggagawa (PM), Philippine Ecumenical Action for Community Empowerment (PEACE), Foundation, Inc., Philippine Network of Rural Development Initiatives (Philnet-RDI), Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) - Gender Desk, PIGLAS Kababaihan, PKKK-K!, Public Services Labor Independent Confederation (PSLINK), SANLAKAS Women, SARILAYA, SDK, Social Watch, Ugnayan ng Kababaihan sa Pulitika (UKP), WomanHealth Philippines, Inc., Women’s Crisis Center (WCC), Women’s Education Development Productivity and Research Organization (WEDPRO),

Womenspace, and Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO).