

# **Reproductive Health Rights Bills**

*(Population Management Must Conform  
With The Constitution and Our Laws)\**

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AQUILINO Q. PIMENTEL, JR.\*\*

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## ***Introduction***

Mr. President, in the gallery today are delegations from the interfaith community of this country which count among their members several adherents of various faiths not only from the Catholic religion but also from other faiths, including Orthodox Christianity as well as Protestant groups.

The bills that I speak of, Mr. President are controversial, among other things, because of their advocacy that women should have full autonomy over their bodies. Pushed to its logical conclusion, the advocacy would invest women with the right to prevent or, worse, terminate ‘unwanted pregnancies.’

The term ‘unwanted pregnancies’ is itself, pregnant with meaning. It is a clever way of defining an issue in a manner that makes it difficult for those who reject the thrust of the bills to appear rational in their opposition.

## ***Mother Teresa***

Who, for instance, but a Mother Teresa (who once said, “Don’t kill your child, give the baby to me.”) would want the fruit of an ‘unwanted pregnancy’?

The bills, therefore, Mr. President, would invest women with the power to prevent unwanted pregnancies. How?

In two ways:

First, the two bills would make all sorts of contraceptives available to women regardless of whether or not those contraceptives are actually or may be suspect as abortifacients.

Second, by inference, if not in fact, the bills would grant women absolute power over their bodies. Inferentially, if not actually, women would have the power to end ‘unwanted pregnancies’. In fact, Mr. President, the original

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\* Privilege Speech delivered in the Senate Session Hall on 25 November 2003, in opposition to House Bill No. 4110 and Senate Bill No. 2325; with end notes and Annexes on related points

\*\* Senator, 12th Congress of the Republic of the Philippines

explanatory note of House Bill No. 4110 filed on December 19, 2001, advocated the legalization of abortion. It was only because it had drawn a furious outcry from the public that the authors beat a hasty retreat and changed it with a less confrontational one.

For if 'unwanted pregnancies' occur, what are the hapless women supposed to do? Since the pregnancies are 'unwanted', would it not follow that the women concerned should be allowed a "safe way" to terminate the pregnancies? In blunt talk, Mr. President, that means aborting the fetus "safely", perhaps, for the mother but most certainly 'unsafely' for the baby whose life would be terminated with extreme prejudice.

### ***Ultimate Objective***

That, I guess, is the reason why the explanatory notes of the two bills harp on the supposedly high statistics of women dying of abortion-related causes. If the country were to prevent more women from dying of unsafe abortion practices, the answer of abortionists would be to provide them with safe abortion methods. In fairness, the bills in question do not state it categorically, but it is logical to assume that their ultimate objective is to establish, among other things, so-called 'safe abortion facilities'.

Still, the bills do advocate methods of population control that collide head on with the Constitution, with the Civil Code and with the Penal Code. And therefore, the thrust of my speech is to talk about the Constitution, the Civil Code and the Penal Code as basis for rejecting the bills in question.

### ***The Constitution***

Let us start with the fundamental law of the land. There are two articles of the Constitution that I would like to cite to show that the population control methods proposed in the bills run counter to the Constitution.

These are Article II and Article XV. We will discuss them sequentially.

Article II, Section 12, of the Constitution provides that: "The State shall ... equally protect the life of the mother and the life of the unborn from conception...."

The provision acknowledges two things: (1) that life begins at conception; and (2) that the life of the mother is of equal value as the life of the unborn child.

The proponents of the bills are fudging the constitutional dictum that life begins at conception. They say that life does not begin at conception but at

'implantation'. This is crucial to their advocacy because in their minds methods that prevent 'implantation' are justified because there is no life yet at conception.

### ***Beginning of Life***

But when does life begin? Although we have seen how the Constitution and other laws have answered the question, it is best that we look for the answer also scientifically rather than simply jurisprudentially.

Some people say that the answer may be: (1) theological, (2) philosophical, or (3) biological.

I will not delve into the theological or philosophical argument on the beginning of life. I will limit myself to presenting the medical or biological basis of the constitutional, civil law and penal code conclusions that life begins at conception.

In biology, authorities say that there should be no controversy, no disagreement, after all, "there is only one set of facts, only one embryology book that is studied in medical school. The more scientific knowledge of fetal development that has been learned, the more science has confirmed that any one human individual's life, biologically speaking, begins at the completion of the union of his or her father's sperm and his or her mother's ovum, a process called 'conception,' 'fertilization' or 'fecundation.'" (*Dr. & Mrs. J.C. Wilke, Why Can't We Love Them Both?*)

### ***Alive from Fecundation***

Biologically, it is established that the fetus is alive at fecundation. (*See testimony of Dr. H. Gordon, Chair, Dept. of Genetics; Dr. Madeline Matthews-Roth, Harvard Medical School, Apr. 23-24, 1981; Dr. Jerome Lejeune, known as the father of modern genetics and Dr. Landrum Shettles, discoverer of male-female producing sperm before US Senate Judiciary subcommittee.*)

The fetus is alive because he or she has the characteristics of life. That is, he or she can reproduce his or her own cells and develop them into a specific pattern of maturity and function. The reverse is perhaps easier to understand: the fetus is not dead. (*Dr. & Mrs. J.C. Wilke, same book; see also opinions of Dr. Haddad LM., the Culture of Life in Save our Nation, Cross Publication, Savannah, Georgia, 2000; Dr. Pellegrino, Ed, Christian Virtues in Medical Practice, Georgetown Press, Washington, D.C., 1946.*)

If as biology finds that human life begins at conception, then it follows that contraception prevents implantation of the zygote and the entry and use of abortifacient drugs, devices or medicines should be banned in this country.

### ***Semantic Distortion***

But is 'conception' not different from 'fertilization'?

Since 150 years ago and for a long time thereafter, both words had been used to mean the union of sperm and ovum. In the 1960s, however, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology attempted to redefine 'conception' to mean 'implantation' as the beginning of life. In the redefinition, Mr. President, conception was no longer made synonymous with fertilization.

Because of the 'semantic distortion', it is now possible to call an intrauterine device a 'contraceptive' even though it is, in fact, an abortifacient.

The semantic distortion is by no means accepted universally as many other nations use 'conception', 'fertilization' and 'fecundation' interchangeably.

### ***New Findings: Zygote Has Life***

A Special Report of Time magazine of November 11, 2002 just a few days ago, Mr. President, citing a book, *From Conception to Birth: A Life Unfolds*, by Alexander Tsiaras and Barry Werth, however, graphically documents by pictures and text that the development process of a baby begins from "the fusion of the sperm and the egg" and from there, the tiny zygote grows and divides into two cells, then four, then eight and so on.

The frenetic activities of the zygote, Mr. President that takes place in quick succession from conception all the way up to birth can only mean that it has life even before it implants itself on the wall of the uterus.

### ***Value of the Unborn***

The issue that life begins from conception is already established scientifically and the scientific conclusion is echoed in the Constitution in Article II. And that dictum, Mr. President, is also reiterated in other laws as we will discuss later.

But before we leave Article II, let us recall that the same article also wisely proclaims that the life of the unborn child is equal of importance to that of the mother. The provision rejects the facile argument that the life of the child is more expendable than the life of the mother. Hence, the mother cannot just decide on

her own that she no longer wants to have the baby in her womb and expel it because she has “autonomy over her body.”

### ***Tri-pillar Guidepost***

Another constitutional article bars the adoption of the population control methods proposed in the two bills. I refer to Article XV of the Constitution that erects a tri-pillar policy as State guideposts in the founding of families in the country.

The first pillar, Mr. President, is found in clause 1, paragraph 1 of Article XV of the Constitution. It obliges the State to “defend ... the right of spouses to found a family in accordance with their religious convictions; ...”

The second pillar is found in clause 2, of the same paragraph. It binds the State to uphold “the demands of responsible parenthood”.

The third pillar is found in Section 3, paragraph 4 of the same article, which obligates the State to defend “the right of families or family associations to participate in the planning and implementation of policies and programs that affect them.”

### ***Religious Convictions***

The first pillar, Mr. President, is based on the recognition that the decisions of parents on how big their families should be, the spacing of their children and how these objectives are to be attained are not only physical but spiritual issues also.

The government may not, therefore, validly accept any money coming from any source for purposes of population control if the methods contravene the “religious convictions” of the parents. Among these religious convictions is that life begins at conception and that its development from conception to birth may not be interfered with by the use of drugs or devices to kill it.

### ***Responsible Parenthood***

Now, the second pillar, Mr. President, directly points to the acceptable, legal and constitutional way of managing the country’s population growth, and that is by responsible parenthood.

Properly harnessed, the demands of responsible parenthood would answer fears that the country would end up as the most populous on earth. For responsible parenthood means bearing and rearing children whose needs —

physical, moral and spiritual — parents can reasonably take care of. It certainly does not mean encouraging people to multiply the human species like rabbits, Mr. President, without regard to the means and the resources that are needed to enable families to live as human beings fit not only to be the subjects of the kingdom of God, but also as citizens of the Republic.

### ***Family Participation***

The third pillar, Mr. President, obligates the State to defend “the right of families or family associations to participate in the planning and implementation of policies and programs that affect them.”

Hence, to distribute condoms and oral contraceptives, insert IUDs, implant sets of Norplant, inject contraception preventives into women or supply abortifacient drugs or devices to them under the program being propagated by the proponents of population control in the country today would violate the Constitution unless the participation of families and family associations is first done and their consent and approval are secured in its planning and implementation.

The population control methods advocated in the bills, Mr. President, also transgress the country’s civil and penal codes.

### ***Civil Laws***

The bills in question would shove aside, at least, one article of the Civil Code and one article of The Child and Youth Welfare Code.

These are Article 40 of the Civil Code and Article 3 of the Child and Youth Welfare Code.

Article 40, Mr. President, provides that “Birth determines personality; but the conceived child shall be considered born for all purposes that are favorable to it, provided that it be born later with the conditions specified in the following article,” which is Article 41.

### ***Rights of a Conceived Child***

What does the article mean? It can mean two things: (1) That an unborn child already possesses certain rights favorable to him or her; and (2) for that reason, the child though still unborn is already deemed a person.

The right to develop to its full term is a right favorable to the unborn child. The right to be born is a right favorable to the unborn child. The right not to be

harmful in any manner or prematurely expelled from the mother's womb is a right favorable to the unborn child. In brief, the unborn child has the right to life because it is a human being.

### ***Life from Conception***

The Child and Youth Welfare Code, Mr. President, expands the Civil Code (Article 40) thrust that even the unborn is considered a person for all purposes beneficial to it. In Article 3, it says that: "(1) Every child is endowed with the dignity and worth of a human being *from the moment of his (or her) conception* as generally accepted in medical parlance, and has, therefore, the right to be born well." (*Italics provided.*)

In sum, Mr. President, the Civil Code and the Child and Youth Welfare Code proscribe any act or attempt to prevent a fetus from developing to a full term or from attaching itself to or to cause its expulsion from the womb since the said laws recognize that an unborn child has life that is endowed from the moment of conception with dignity and worth as a human being.

### ***Women's Rights***

Let us make it abundantly clear, Mr. President, that although I speak out against the bills in question, I am concerned with the rights of children. I am, in fact, the author of bills to provide a more responsive juvenile justice system and foster care programs precisely to protect our children against abuse.

Neither am I saying that we should not empower women to ensure their equality with men in employment, in access to cooperative loans, and other matters. We should empower them.

Neither am I saying that we should just close our eyes to women being battered or subjected to all sorts of violence. Let the users of violence against women be prosecuted and jailed. And for the record, I support the thrust of the bill against domestic violence now pending in Congress.

Neither am I saying that women have no right to get the best treatment possible for their ailments. They do.

Lastly, neither am I saying that women do not have any right whatsoever over how they should treat their bodies. Of course, they have – in the same manner that all persons have the same right — but only up to a point, Mr. President. The point when the law says it would be criminal to proceed further.

### ***Criminal Law***

This is where the Revised Penal Code — the law that defines crimes — becomes relevant to the discussion. At least, four Articles of the Code will suffice to show what I mean.

Article 235 penalizes people who help others to commit suicide even if the former believe that it is best for the latter to die. I mention the example to show that the act of abetting a person who wants to commit suicide although probably well intentioned is still deemed to be a criminal act.

Article 256, Mr. President, penalizes those who cause abortion intentionally and Article 257, those who cause abortion unintentionally.

And Article 259 penalizes persons who take advantage of their special training like doctors, midwives or pharmacists to commit abortion with higher penalties than those imposed on others.

I am, thus, not quite comfortable with the basic premise of the bills, Mr. President, that women have absolute discretion on what they want to do with their bodies. The premise does not seem to be sound at all.

### ***Limits to Rights***

For there are limits to what women may do with their bodies — or men for that matter — and the limits are what the law imposes.

The Revised Penal Code, a man-made law, prohibits abortion; so do the Ten Commandments, a moral law, as interpreted by the Church, at least by the Catholic Church, to which 85% of the people belong.

### ***Dispassionate Discourse***

As I wind up, Mr. President, I say to all that we can debate on this issue dispassionately as mature citizens interested in maintaining a sound balance between the demands of our growing population and the availability of our resources to sustain the lives of our people in dignity, prosperity and peace.

And while I speak out against what I believe are violations of our constitutional law, civil law and penal law, in the matter of managing our population growth, we do see the country's so-called population explosion as a valid matter of concern.

The problem, among other things, is that for a long time, we have allowed foreign donors to dominate the country's response to our population concerns. By refusing to tackle the bull by the horns, the government has given up its responsibility to defend the right of spouses to found families in accordance with their religious convictions. By defaulting on that responsibility and allowing foreign donors to fund contraceptive-bound population control programs, the government has also failed and continues to fail to afford families and family associations the right to participate in the planning and implementation of policies affecting them.

In this regard, Mr. President, we wish that the other countries that want us to manage our population growth would respect our sensitivities on population control methods that intrude into our way of looking at family matters and do violence to our cultural and religious values.

### ***NSSM 200***

To better understand where this problem of population control methods started from, let me refer this Body to the U.S. National Security Study Memorandum 200, which is annexed in the speech, that was done in 1974, Mr. President.

It is the strategic policy document that launched a population control program for the U.S. government from 1975. Among its basic premises is that the growing populations of the underdeveloped world, including ours, pose a threat to the national security of the United States. As far as the U.S. authorities are concerned, the rapid population growth of the underdeveloped world, including ours, would adversely impact on U. S. access to the strategic resources needed by it to remain as the dominant superpower.

The Reagan administration, Mr. President, however, started to question the validity of the premises of National Security Study Memorandum 200. So does President George W. Bush today.

### ***Bush Decision, Right***

The decision of U.S. President Bush to cut off the \$30 million USAID funds coursed through the UNFPC was based on findings that the funds, Mr. President, have been used to promote abortion. That decision has set off cries of the population control advocates that we should either try to dissuade the U.S. government from implementing the Bush decision or put up our own money to promote it.

I say to them, Mr. President that the U.S. government is right in not continuing with a population control program that runs counter to the basic beliefs of our people as found in our Constitution, our civil law and penal laws.

What we should do, therefore, is to manage our population growth without doing violence to the cultural tenets embodied in the Constitution, the civil law and penal laws of this country.

### *Acceptable Guideposts*

The guideposts in the matter of managing our population growth must be based on the demands of responsible parenthood and respect for the religious convictions of the parents.

Anything that ignores those guideposts, Mr. President, would be unconstitutional and illegal.

Unfortunately, that is what the two bills in question would want to do. It is, therefore, in the best interests of the nation that the two bills in question should be rejected because their passage would open the floodgates to the unrestricted entry and use of birth control methods that would violate our Constitution, our civil and criminal laws, and make a mockery of the cultural values that we hold dear.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

### *End note:*

<sup>1</sup> The Article following Article 40 is Article 41. It provides that the fetus is considered born only if the fetus is alive at the time the fetus is completely delivered from the mother's womb. The article requires that the fetus must be born alive to be considered as the legitimate subject and object of civil rights and obligations. It is understood that the fetus referred to here is one who is born 'full term', that is, more or less nine months after conception.

If the fetus, although born, only had an intra-uterine life of less than seven months or what is commonly known as a premature baby, then the fetus must live for more than 24 hours after such delivery to be considered as a fit subject and object of legal rights and obligations.

The articles are interlinked not only by its subject, the unborn child, but also by the legal effects that follow the child's birth or death within 24 hours after the child's delivery from the mother's womb. Hence, discussing the two provisions together will hopefully lead to a better understanding of how civil law looks at

the issue of when life begins, the rights of the fetus while inside the womb, and the rights of the child once born.

To acquire civil personality, that is the starting point of a human being's capacity to do things legally or to be the a legal participant in certain acts, Article 40 requires that a conceived child must be born.

<sup>2</sup> "Did Dr. (A.) Liley, the "Father of Fetology," think the tiny being was human? Dr. Liley, who did the first fetal blood transfusion in the womb, said that seven days after fertilization: ". . . the young individual, in command of his environment and destiny with a tenacious purpose, implants in the spongy lining and with a display of physiological power, suppresses his mother's menstrual period. This is his home for the next 270 days and to make it habitable, the embryo develops a placenta and a protective month's capsule of fluid for himself. He also solves, single-handed[ly], the homograft problem, that dazzling feat by which foetus and mother, although immunological foreigners who could not exchange skin grafts nor safely receive blood from each other, nevertheless tolerate each other in parabiosis for nine months." A. Liley, "A Case Against Abortion," *Liberal Studies*, Whitcombe & Tombs, Ltd., 1971.

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2002**

***(Interpellation)***

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*At 4:44 p.m., the session was resumed.*

*The President.* The session is resumed.

The Chair recognizes Sen. Panfilo M. Lacson.

*Senator Lacson.* Thank you, Mr. President.

Will the gentleman from Cagayan de Oro City and the Philippines yield [to] a few questions?

*Senator Pimentel.* Willingly, Mr. President.

*Senator Lacson.* Mr. President, I have not seen the contents of House Bill No. 4110 and Senate Bill No. 2325, but I would certainly fight any legislative proposal that will legalize abortion. I want to make [that] clear.

Likewise, I believe we should all fight any legislative move or proposal that will allow the use of drugs or contraceptives that intend to kill or terminate an unborn child showing or having signs of life at the first instance. Again, I would like to make [that] clear. But I would like to go to a specific instance, Mr. President.

If a father or a husband has decided to use a condom to prevent pregnancy, will that be in violation of the Constitution or any existing law, Mr. President?

**Senator Pimentel.** I would say, Mr. President, that on a personal level, one person doing that would probably sin against the commandments of the Lord, but he may not be transgressing any particular provision except for the fact that when it becomes a policy that condoms are allowed, for example, freely into the country, it will run against the religious convictions of the great majority of the people of this country which, according to the Constitution, must be followed in the matter of founding families.

So, this is where the problem would get complicated. In other words, as far as policy is concerned, if it becomes a policy, I think, that the allowance of condoms to [freely] enter the country would run counter to the provisions of the Constitution that the right of parents to found families in accordance with [their] religious beliefs should be upheld by the State.

**Senator Lacson.** In other words, Mr. President, we do not recognize the responsibility of the State over its citizens?

**Senator Pimentel.** We do. But the responsibility of the State over its citizens is defined by the Constitution. And the Constitution says that spouses can found a family on the basis of their religious convictions. It also says that the State is obligated to defend the right of family or family associations to participate in the planning and implementation of policies and programs that affect them. And certainly, distributing condoms, IUDs, or [whatever] kind of contraceptives, will affect the rights of a family and therefore should be done pursuant to the provisions of the Constitution.

**Senator Lacson.** How about engaging in a population management program that would educate or inform spouses on effective family planning programs, Mr. President? Would that be in violation of any religious belief or any provisions of the Constitution?

**Senator Pimentel.** The burden of my speech is that it is not being done in this country because there is no effort on the part of the State to get family and family associations [involved] in the planning and implementation of [programs] regarding the founding of their families. And this is the burden of my speech.

*Senator Lacson.* If the State does not impose on its citizens to plan their family but it only encourages or educates, what are we violating, Mr. President?

*Senator Pimentel.* If the encouragement or the education conforms to the principles of the Constitution that these are in accordance with the religious convictions of the family, there is no violation.

*Senator Lacson.* In other words, Mr. President, if a State embarks on an effective or efficient population management program, then there is no conflict with the gentleman from Cagayan de Oro?

*Senator Pimentel.* If the policy violates the religious convictions of the parents, if the policy is adopted without consultation, without participation of the families and the family associations — these are the wordings of the Constitution, incidentally, Mr. President — then that policy would contradict the constitutional mandate.

*Senator Lacson.* How does it consult or how does it coordinate with families, Mr. President? What will be acceptable in this regard?

*Senator Pimentel.* That will need not only a superficial consultation but a thorough consultation with the people of this country, because we are talking here of policy, Mr. President. It will not do, for example, for a family population control exponent to go to a barangay and say: “This is good for you.” That is not in accord with the Constitution. Since we are talking about policies, there has to be, in Tagalog, *pangmalawakan* (widespread) kind of consultation.

*Senator Lacson.* Mr. President, I think the disagreements are mainly due to semantics and definitions, but the actual practice or the actual policy to be enforced by the State is another thing.

*Senator Pimentel.* I hope that that were true because even as the State is already bound by the constitutional mandate that life begins at conception, there is an attempt to fudge that issue by saying that “No, according to the exponents of Population Control, life begins at implantation.”

Incidentally, when I say this I am not only talking of specific instances in the Philippines, but that is a worldwide kind of [argument] that has been used at the Budapest Conference, at the Cairo Conference, at the China Conference. I do not know what the latest conference is on family planning, Mr. President.

But I hope the gentleman is right when he says that it is only a question of semantics. I am not too sure that it is.

*Senator Lacson.* When does conception actually begin, Mr. President? Is it before the fusion of the sperm and the egg?

*Senator Pimentel.* The conventional wisdom is that conception begins upon the union of the sperm and the egg even before it is implanted, before the zygote is implanted on the uterine wall.

*Senator Lacson.* In other words, the use of condom will not be in violation of that logic, Mr. President, that there is no union yet between the sperm and the cell by using condom.

*Senator Pimentel.* Theoretically speaking, that might be correct except for the fact that the use of the condoms might contradict the religious convictions of the greater masses of the people here.

*Senator Lacson.* If the State cannot anymore feed 160 million Filipinos by year 2030, Mr. President, –

*Senator Pimentel.* I am not too sure that we cannot....

*Senator Lacson.* – are we being pro life or pro family if that is the situation?

*Senator Pimentel.* The question need not be “Can we feed x number of people by year 2030”? The question is, the matter of the proliferation of so many people is a question of poverty and, therefore, should be accordingly addressed as a poverty issue. It is not a birth control issue, Mr. President.

*Senator Lacson.* At any rate, Mr. President, I do not like to engage in a protracted debate on the issue. Needless to say, we are in agreement that before the union of the sperm and the egg there is nothing being violated, whether it is our religious belief or the Constitution.

*Senator Pimentel.* Again, let me say that I do not subscribe to that proposition because, according to the Constitution, the religious convictions of the parents must always be taken into account in matters connected with the founding of families. Therefore, distributing condoms and other forms of contraception would already be in violation of that constitutional mandate.

*Senator Lacson.* But distributing and using are two different things, Mr. President. If the State distributes but the families do not want to use the condoms being distributed, then what are we violating?

**Senator Pimentel.** We are trying to tell the State that even as it is the State, even as government, it is bound by the strictures of the Constitution. [It cannot do as it pleases on matters of this kind as well as in matters involving human rights,] Mr. President.

**Senator Lacson.** Anyway, as I said, I do not want to prolong the interpellation. That is all in the meantime, Mr. President. Thank you.

**Senator Pimentel.** In the meantime, why does the gentleman not continue now? [Laughter]

*The President.* Sen. John H. Osmena is recognized.

**Senator Osmena (J).** Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to say that I adhere strictly to the belief that once there has been a union, once there is life we should not interfere with the progress of that life within the mother.

With no intention originally of rising, I rise to ask for clarification as to whether we are confusing, Mr. President, the religious conviction of a person with the teachings and the dogma of the church to which that person may belong.

Mr. President, the Constitution provides that we should respect religious conviction. Is it the gentleman's thesis therefore that the conviction of a person should reflect or adhere strictly to the teachings and the dogma of the church?

**Senator Pimentel.** Again, Mr. President, when we talk of religious convictions in relation to the founding of families, we are talking here of policy. We are not talking of individual preferences or individual religions. We are talking of the fact that the Philippines has a very large Christian population and therefore, the Christian beliefs — I do not even have to stress the word 'Christian' because I know that our brother and sister Muslims in Mindanao also do not wish to be seen or be perceived as if they are promoting or accepting the promotion of questionable methods of contraception, more particularly because they abjure abortion.

What I am saying, therefore, Mr. President, is, in matters of policy, one has to abide, if it is the government, it has to abide by the will of the greater number of people in a given community.

**Senator Osmena (J).** Mr. President, that is where I beg to disagree because in Section 1, paragraph (1) of Article XV of the Constitution, it obliges the State to defend the right of spouses to found a family in accordance with their...". and the word 'their' in this particular provision is a very personal thing. It is their

religious conviction, the personal religious conviction of the spouses and not the teachings or the dogma of the church to which they may belong.

**Senator Pimentel.** Again, Mr. President, let me just say that the ‘families’ that are spoken of here are not individual people when we talk of policy. Because, obviously, we cannot have a policy where only one spouse or only one family will be affected — a policy that is based on what a particular family believes in.

Therefore, we are saying that that phrase in clause (2) should be tied up with Section 3, paragraph (4) of the same article which obligates the State to defend the right of families or family associations to participate in the planning and in the implementation of policies and programs that affect them.

So obviously, Mr. President, if there is no effort on the part of government to, first, formulate a policy; and second, to get the people involved in the formulation of that policy, any attempt to individually implement that policy would be violative of the Constitution.

**Senator Osmena (J).** Mr. President, I do not think we can come to an agreement on this because my personal interpretation here is that a religious conviction is a personal matter. And within the latitude that that person may choose to adhere to the dogmas or teachings of the church to which he or she belongs, that person has a freedom of action that is personal. This is as stated in the Constitution and I do not think there is jurisprudence on this. Until such time when there is jurisprudence, I guess in our legislating policy on the interpretation of these provisions of the Constitution, we should all be guided by our personal perception on how these should be interpreted.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**Senator Pimentel.** Mr. President, there is some point to the gentleman’s position, but let me repeat. When the matter [pertains to] protecting the religious convictions of parents, [to] obliging the State to defend the right of these parents to participate in the planning and formulation of policies, that becomes a constitutional mandate that already transcends personal convictions. And it is on that basis, when we speak of policies, that we are demanding that before this government embarks on promoting contraceptives or distributing condoms and intrauterine devices, it should start from a policy adoption that is sanctioned by the will of the families as provided for in Article XV, paragraph (4) of the Constitution.

*The President.* Sen. Vicente C. Sotto III is recognized.

*Senator Sotto.* Mr. President, will the distinguished Senator from Mindanao yield [to] some questions? I assure the gentleman that it will not be few, judging from the healthy debate that was being proposed earlier.

*Senator Pimentel.* Certainly, Mr. President.

*Senator Sotto.* Mr. President, this is one topic that I love talking about. For one thing, this is one topic that has been abused by a lot of people and has been used to confuse even legislators like us.

So if the gentleman does not mind, I will try to dwell on some issues that have been raised earlier not only by the distinguished gentleman who has crafted a well-prepared speech that I fully support, but also by some of our members who pointed out some issues that I would [also] like to be enlightened on. So, if by 10:30 tonight, I am not finished with my interpellation, I do not mind if my colleagues will all leave.

Levity aside, Mr. President, I was tempted to ask the gentleman about his definition of the word ‘confusion’. Because there is this confusing term that has been used and abused by some of those who propose population control in the world which is the phrase ‘reproductive health’.

Based on my research, Mr. President, ‘reproductive health’ or the so-called ‘reproductive rights’ include abortion. Some people will say “no” right away. Some will say, “No, that is not true.” But let me point out to them that last year, the United Nations representative at the International Conference on Children in Ontario, Canada, admitted in open plenary that “reproductive health and reproductive rights include abortion on demand, especially for the youth.”

May I know the gentleman’s comment on this, Mr. President? Because, as I said, to those who are not really into the fight, they say that, “No, reproductive health does not include abortion.” That was what they [said] but they were not the proponents. The proponent in the United Nations admitted this. What does the gentleman think of this?

*Senator Pimentel.* Mr. President, it is not only the admission of that delegate from the United States on the scope of the phrase “reproductive rights including abortion”. The fact is, President Bush himself decided to cut-off the U.S. assistance to the UN population-planning activities because, according to him, the funds were being used for abortion.

I think this is very crucial because as President of the United States, I do not think President Bush will make that kind of a decision without any basis, Mr. President.

I think that, indeed, ‘reproductive rights’ or whatever is the phraseology would cover abortion. That is the reason why we should be careful about the use of semantics here because we can be misled into believing that, “It is all right, they are talking of health rights.” Who will object to health rights, Mr. President? I do not think anybody will object to health rights. But certainly, when the rights include the killing of the unborn, include promoting activities that run into conflict with our Constitution, with our Civil law, and with our Penal law, there is cause for alarm, and I think we should put our foot down in that respect, Mr. President.

*Senator Sotto.* I thank the gentleman for that.

Now, Mr. President, it seems that with the answer of the gentleman, the confusion is also coupled with deception by some people because like, for example, if we will localize the issue, I hope those who think that the point that I raised is incorrect would talk to the Director of the University of the Philippines’ Population Institute, Dr. Cabigon.

During the technical working group in the Lower House in the last Congress on the so-called “Integrated Population and Development Bill,” she openly admitted that the United Nations definition of ‘reproductive health’ and ‘reproductive rights’ include abortion. We [could] probably have Dr. Cabigon repeat that in the Senate because it is in the records of the House.

If we will look at the way ‘reproductive health’ or ‘reproductive health services’ is being mentioned by the UN representative and the UP Director, then it is safe to say that abortion is being disguised as ‘reproductive health’.

How much is being spent [on] abortion today, Mr. President?

*Senator Pimentel.* What I know about expenses and funding is that, in the Philippines alone, US\$5 million had been set aside for the promotion of all kinds of population-control methods. But as I said, President Bush recently ordered the cancellation of this amount.

Now, I understand that the Legislators Population Organization which incidentally is housed in the House ... I wonder why an NGO is given such a privilege to nest in the House of Representatives itself when its programs are questionable. I mean, I really think that it is about time, we, as a coordinate Body, will also move to expel that group from the House so that it can transfer to wherever it wants as a private NGO. It should not use the cover of legislation as a reason for riding on the facilities of the House, Mr. President, for free. I think it sets a very bad precedent in that respect.

*Senator Sotto.* Well, Mr. President, I definitely agree with the gentleman on that.

Those who believe in reproductive health but do not believe in abortion, maybe, in the phrases and in the debates or when they bring up the subject, or even in the bills that are being proposed to the gentleman, maybe they would agree to include that a caveat be placed “provided abortion shall not be a part of such and such.” Would the gentleman agree to that, Mr. President?

*Senator Pimentel.* Mr. President, there is already some kind of a disclaimer that is found in the bill authored by Senator Biazon. It does not include abortion.

But the point that we are trying to drive at is that policies on family planning, policies on population control must be adopted in consultation with the families all over the country who will be affected by it pursuant to the mandate of the Constitution. So that I would really wish to emphasize that sometimes, Mr. President, it is not just a question of semantics, there is the question of the failure of the government and probably of concerned groups of this country to come together and define a policy on population management or planning, whatever we want to call it, but always in accordance with the strictures of the Constitution. And I think we can go a long way if [it] should come about.

*Senator Sotto.* Mr. President, I would like to dwell on that topic of population planning that the distinguished gentleman mentioned because there are also some myths and some confusion in this representation’s mind concerning that. But let me just wind up my point on the abortion issue.

I am not sure whether it was delivered here in the Senate Floor or it was in a talk show that I heard this, but there were figures being mentioned, and this is attributed to the University of the Philippines. They said that there are approximately 400,000 to 500,000 abortions in the Philippines today. It was attributed to a UP study. Is abortion not a crime in the Philippines as defined in the Revised Penal Code and is a constitutional violation?

*Senator Pimentel.* If the statistics are true, Mr. President, and if the circumstances under which the abortions were committed would fall under the strictures of the Revised Penal Code, certainly, these would be crimes. But as we see, they are asking us – those of us who oppose these bills – to fall into the trap of choosing whether we will allow 400,000 Filipino women to die of unsafe abortions or do we allow them to have safe abortions? I do not think that the question should be framed in that manner. I think that the matter of abortions being committed in this country can be [separately] dealt with as an issue.

*Senator Sotto.* Yes.

*Senator Pimentel.* Certainly, as the distinguished gentleman very well pointed out, there are other factors that will militate against the premise that the solution is to adopt safe methods of abortion.

*At 5:13 p.m., the Senate President relinquished the Chair to the President Pro Tempore.*

*Senator Sotto.* Well, Mr. President, the point that I would like to drive at is, if these researchers from the University of the Philippines know 400,000 to 500,000 abortions, what have they done about it? It is illegal; it is a criminal act. Maybe they could help track down and prosecute these 400,000 to 500,000 abortions. Maybe we can file criminal suits against these people [*Laughter*] if this is true.

So, I tend to believe that this is an exaggeration, Mr. President, in much the same way as the so-called ‘overpopulation’ in the Philippines is concerned. That is also an exaggeration.

I say this and I would like the comment of the distinguished gentleman, Mr. President, on this. I say that this is an exaggeration because if we are to believe that there are 70 million Filipinos in the country today, 10 million approximately, based on their statistics also, are concentrated in Metro Manila or the National Capital Region.

So, in the National Capital Region, if we have 10 million Filipinos, the area or the total area of Metro Manila is 636 square kilometers. So the computation would be 15,723 persons per square kilometer. That is what we have in Metro Manila right now.

*Senator Pimentel.* In Metro Manila.

*Senator Sotto.* Medyo masikip. Matrapik, hindi po ba?

*Senator Pimentel.* High density.

*Senator Sotto.* All right, high density. But at present, let us elevate it to the level of the globe. At present, the global population is 5.4 billion. If I pick out a big state in the United States like Texas-- the land area of Texas is 691,201 square kilometers--with that, we can do a little math, Mr. President, and compute by placing 5.4 billion people in the State of Texas. In other words, pagsama-samahin nating lahat ang tao sa mundo ngayon, itong oras na ito--5.4 billion--

ilagay natin sa Texas, the density would only be 7,812 persons per square kilometer.

**Senator Pimentel.** Measured in the density here in Manila today.

**Senator Sotto.** In Metro Manila. And that is for the whole world, Mr. President. So, where is the population explosion? *Ano kaya ang criteria nila* to define a “population explosion”? Is this not [also] a different way of confusing people?

**Senator Pimentel.** The demographic argument, Mr. President, is one way of confusing us who are not experts in demography. But as the gentleman very well pointed out, a simple mathematical computation would show the fallacy of that argument. Besides, take a look at the situation in the country today.

In our consultation with the overseas Filipinos abroad, we found out that there are 7.4 million Filipinos living outside the country. That should be deducted if we want to go over this issue of per person, per individual. The 7.4 million Filipinos living abroad should be deducted from the population pressure in this country and then we add the latest statistics coming from the Department of Labor and Employment that 3,000 Filipinos are going out of the country everyday. So, it looks like we will never arrive at the density of population that is feared by the proponents of the population control advocacies.

**Senator Sotto.** Also, Mr. President, to add to that, the gentleman, being the local government expert, does he not think that the issue of bloated number is true, is real, as far as local governments are concerned — the municipalities which want to be classified as third class or first class, provinces that instead of having 100,000 population, they want to be 200,000 population for the Internal Revenue Allotment share. *Mga lungsod, hindi po ba?* Does he not think that the “70 million” or “80 million Filipinos” is an exaggeration also?

**Senator Pimentel.** There is reason to believe that this number is inflated, Mr. President. I would like to put on record that, indeed, I, myself, in my capacity as the former chair of the Committee on Local Government, have received reports that population figures in provinces, cities and municipalities are sometimes exaggerated so that the local government units concerned could avail themselves of a greater share in the Internal Revenue monies allocated to them.

**Senator Sotto.** Thank you, Mr. President.

Also, I would like to thank the gentleman for pointing out that there was a *Time* magazine article that he mentioned on when life begins. Would he be able to provide the members of this Chamber?

**Senator Pimentel.** Yes, certainly, Mr. President. We will do that.

**Senator Sotto.** Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to be enlightened by that article because I always believe in the saying as being espoused by Senator Lacson that life begins at 40.

There are other points that I would like to raise but it is not covered by the distinguished gentleman's speech. Instead of winding up at ten thirty, I would like to wind up now and probably prepare for the interpellation that we would like to put into the Senate Floor when the bills on population control are brought out.

At this point, we would like to congratulate the distinguished gentleman for his well-crafted message, and we wish to be associated with the contents of such.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**Senator Pimentel.** Thank you very much, Mr. President.

*The President Pro Tempore.* The Majority Leader is recognized.

**Senator Legarda.** To continue the interpellation, I move that we recognize Sen. Gregorio B. Honasan.

*The President Pro Tempore.* Sen. Gregorio B. Honasan is recognized.

**Senator Honasan.** Thank you very much, Mr. President.

With the continued indulgence and patience of the distinguished gentleman, I would like to ask if the distinguished gentleman from Cagayan de Oro and the republic is willing to answer just a few clarificatory questions.

**Senator Pimentel.** With pleasure, Mr. President, yes.

**Senator Honasan.** Mr. President, first of all, this humble representation would like to associate himself with the spirit of the speech. We are also categorically against abortion, against abortifacient, against artificial means if these are incorporated in a long-term population management policy.

I have [personally] noticed that whenever the issue of birth control or population control is raised, it generates more questions than answers. Since the premise of the speech of the distinguished gentleman is, our population management must conform with the Constitution and other laws, is it possible

that the law is not that clear, or the spirit of the law is not that clear about population management?

*Senator Pimentel.* We have something there, Mr. President, because the thing is there is no coherent population policy that has been adopted by this government. Up to now, what is done in the field of population management is done through the auspices of foreign donors. In other words, without the benefit of the participation of the families affected by such policies as demanded by the Constitution itself. So the Constitution sets out broad guidelines to be fleshed out by the State or by the government in, I suppose, specific legislation.

*Senator Honasan.* Thank you Mr. President. I will not deal with the issue of whether since the law is not clear, it is time that we rethink or reconsider seriously whether we should amend the law or the constitution. That is an entirely separate issue.

So, I would like to deal with the law itself, like in Article XV, Section 3, paragraph 2, which says, "The right of children to assistance including proper care and nutrition and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation and other conditions prejudicial to their development" is incorporated in, I guess, its proper spirit. If we consider population management, and looking at this issue in a focused manner, as beginning from whatever technical parameters there are, I guess the issue goes beyond the fetus. And when we have young children suffering from, let us say, effects of air pollution, suffering from non-implementation of the Clean Air Act, we consider this as a separate issue.

Again, Mr. President, I would like to ask: Is this part of the context of the issue that the gentleman has raised?

*Senator Pimentel.* Mr. President, the care for children, the obligation to see to it that their quality of life is good can be covered within the rubric of responsible parenthood.

In other words, Mr. President, if the parents follow the strictures of the Constitution, that among the principles that will imbue policies on family founding would be the demands of responsible parenthood, that means that they will bear only such children as would be reasonably taken care of.

Of course, the gentleman has pointed out, Mr. President, that there are other matters that intrude into the care of children that may not necessarily be covered only by a definition of "when life begins." Because obviously, when we talk of when life begins, we are only talking of conception as the beginning of life pursuant to the constitutional requirement. So that mandate to take care of

children is also another mandate that we need to address. There is no question about that.

*Senator Honasan.* Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, just maybe two more questions.

The family is the strongest and our most fundamental, political, economic, and social unit. So everything really hinges on the family. But I would like to ask if there are any other sectors, now that we have defined the objective, which is a long-term comprehensive population policy. What other critical sectors should be involved in organizing Philippine society aside from the family or banking on the strength of the family so that we can move forward based on a clear, long-term comprehensive population management program?

*Senator Pimentel.* Aside from the family, Mr. President, we have to consider the thinking of the church. We have to consider the thinking of government.

In other words, all agencies, all units of governance in the country will have to be brought into play pursuant to the requirements of the Constitution which is, among other things, that as far as family foundations are concerned, the religious convictions of the spouses must be respected; the right of the parents to participate in the planning and formulation of policies regarding the foundation of families must also be upheld. So all of these things will have to converge so that we have a holistic approach to the protection of the family in this country.

*Senator Honasan.* Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I was so glad that the gentleman mentioned the church and government.

In a hurriedly personalized or personalistic society, are government and the church leading by clear example?

*Senator Pimentel.* I would say no, Mr. President. The fact is, our government has allowed foreign donors to dominate the population program in this country so that as a result of that abdication of their duty to protect the family, to see to it that religious convictions are upheld, that participation of families in the planning of their own families should be taken into account, what has happened is that, *parang*, never mind, just allow the foreign donors to dictate what should happen in this country relative to family control, et cetera, Mr. President, which I think is wrong.

*Senator Honasan.* Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, what about the church? Since it has problems of its own, is it equipped morally now to lead by example?

**Senator Pimentel.** Mr. President, there is no question that the church has suffered from the stigma of some of its adherents primarily men of the cloth who have disgraced the church in many respects. There is no question about that.

My belief, however, does not depend on the sinful nature of some disciples of the church. My faith in the church transcends the sinfulness of its pastors, of its agents. I believe in the sanctity of the church as church founded by my Lord, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, what I am saying is that given the fact that the church is also a human organization, it is bound to commit errors. But in this respect as far as family control and population control methods are concerned, the Constitution is rather specific that the religious convictions of the people must be taken into account. And that is why, or I am saying that if the population control programs of this country would move forward, there is no avoiding having to get the church and the families involved, of course, in the process of formulating policies affecting the family.

*Senator Honasan.* Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, at this point in time, learning from the painful lessons of Senator Lacson, I would like to stop at this point before a press conference is also called to attack our position on the matter which we have not yet articulated.  
[Laughter]

I would like to put on record that this representation would like to be identified with the spirit of the speech and I would like to thank the distinguished sponsor for his patience and his candor.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**Senator Pimentel.** I would also like to thank the distinguished gentleman.

Thank you, Mr. President.

*The President Pro Tempore.* Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR PIMENTEL**  
*(On Reproductive Rights and Certain Issues  
That Impinge on Economic Development)*

**Senator Pimentel.** I have to put it on record. I am very sorry but I must insist on putting these thoughts on record.

I am a Catholic, Mr. President. I follow the teachings of my church on matters of conscience and I will not take that lightly. Of course, Senator Biazon has every right to criticize what appears to him to be demeaning to this Chamber and, probably, there were statements that were uttered that should not have been uttered by the responsible leaders of my church. But I certainly would like to point out that when the time comes for the debate on this issue, I would like to bring out the fact that the introduction of so much money from AID on contraception contradicts a fundamental principle of the Constitution itself.

Mr. President, I will quote very briefly, in less than five minutes, Section 3 of Article XV:

Sec. 3. The State shall defend; (1) the right of spouses to found a family in accordance with their religious convictions and the demands of responsible parenthood;

Therefore, Mr. President, there are two sides to this question, if we would want to put it in that manner and I certainly would want to elevate the debate to a higher plane so that we preclude name-calling or attacking one religion over the other. That might not be a good idea.

Therefore, Mr. President, the next time this issue will be brought out, I would like to make of record that I will certainly stand in opposition to this bill that Senator Biazon is espousing. Of course, I will also speak on certain issues that impinge on the economic development of this nation – that the sad state of the economy does not necessarily arise from the fact that there are too many people in this country. I do not think so. The right of the family to a living wage and income is also provided [for] in the Constitution, and that has not been apparently followed.

Thank you, Mr. President.

*Senator Biazon.* Mr. President....

*The President.* The Majority Leader is recognized.

*Senator Biazon.* Mr. President, may I ask the Floor.

*The President.* The Majority Leader is recognized.

*Senator Leviste.* Yes, Mr. President. I ask that we recognize Senator Biazon just to respond to Senator Pimentel.

*Senator Biazon.* Just a few sentences in answer to this. I am not, Mr. President.... Have I been recognized?

*The President.* The Chair now recognizes Senator Biazon.

*Senator Biazon.* Thank you, Mr. President.

Just an immediate response. It was actually the name-calling that had been resorted to by the oppositors to this representation's proposals that triggered this delivery this afternoon, Mr. President.

I have no intention to pick a quarrel with anyone, nor with any sector. But let this be, as moved earlier, the subject of debate in the coming days. Indeed, we have to examine this policy that is, I think, needed by our country today.

So I will welcome a debate in the coming days on this issue.

Thank you.

*Senator Leviste.* Yes, Mr. President. As earlier suggested, a full debate on the issue will be made in the coming week.

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**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2002**

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*Senator Leviste.* I ask that Sen. Rodolfo G. Biazon be recognized who wishes to make a manifestation, Mr. President.

*The President.* Sen. Rodolfo G. Biazon is recognized.

**MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR BIAZON**

*(For a Review of the Impact of the  
Full Implementation of GATT-WTO)*

*Senator Biazon.* Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, this representation was invited to a conference of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development.

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Now, Mr. President, one of the information that I got from that forum is a report from the eastern and western European countries. According to this report, only 35% of the populace of the Eastern European countries are using contraceptives, and these are not even abortifacient.

In the western European countries, 65% of the populace are using contraceptives. But what is stunning about this report is that, the incidence of abortion in Eastern Europe is ten times that of incidence of abortion in western European countries. [This is telling] us that there is a direct correlation in the use of contraceptives relative to incidence of abortion.

So, going by that information, if the issue that is being used in opposing these pending bills in the Senate is, we are for abortion, that, Mr. President, is in addition to the fact that this is a deliberate disinformation being used by the Church to oppose these bills.

Our contention is that, if we use population planning we are going to prevent unwanted pregnancies. And according to the study of the University of the Philippines, there are anywhere from 400,000 to 500,000 incidence of abortion mainly caused by unwanted pregnancy.

So, the bill, Mr. President, is not just all about family planning, but it is all about protecting the reproductive health of our women, of our mothers in this country.

So, with that, I am glad I attended that forum because I was able to get [much] information that we can use in this Chamber. And I will submit a formal written report on that trip.

Again, Mr. President, I would like to repeat: my trip was not at the cost of the government. It was supported by the United Nations' funding for population advocacy.

Thank you.

**Senator Pimentel.** Mr. President.

*The President.* Sen. Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr. is recognized.

**Senator Pimentel.** Just a brief statement on the criticism against the Church, Mr. President. Not that the Church cannot defend itself but, for the record, the House bill that speaks of reproductive rights in its explanatory note raises questions that border on, if not actually intrude upon, the prohibition against abortion because it speaks of terminating unwanted pregnancies. What else is that if not the right that is being given to women to abort unwanted pregnancies? I am talking about the House bill; I am not talking of the bill of Senator Biazon. But these bills—Senator Biazon’s bill and the House bill— would have to be taken into account together by this Chamber.

That is why I simply would want to put on record that the apprehension of the sector that Senator Biazon is adverting to is valid. There are valid grounds to be apprehensive about the intent of this bill which, in effect, copies what U.S. advocates for family control are trying to do in this country to be followed by us.

So, I just want to put that on record so that at the time when the full debate on this issue is carried through in this Chamber, we will have ample opportunity to rebut points with each other.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**Senator Biazon.** Mr. President, I would like to thank the gentleman for this clarification because in the initial copies or versions of the House bill there was reference to that. But I think the House proponents are correcting this through the introduction of a new version that would eliminate or remove any reference to allowing the termination of pregnancies.

Mr. President, the bill that this representation has filed is really not mentioning about abortion. As a matter of fact, the bill filed by this representation has something to do with measures to be taken before the fertilization of the egg. Because anything that we do....Of course, there are differences in the definition of what constitutes abortion from the medical point of view, from the legal point of view and from the religious point of view. The bill that is filed in this Chamber has no reference to any measures that should be taken after the fertilization of the egg in the human body.

So, I think that the bill is not proposing for the legalization of abortion as some of the oppositors to the bill are deliberately disseminating to the public. As a matter of fact, there are even pictures, placards, and posters posted in Catholic schools saying that the Senate bill filed is proposing for the legalization of abortion. Of course, if and when this even gets to the stage of a hearing in the appropriate committee in the Senate, then this will be clarified.

I do hope that we will, once and for all, settle this thing. Whether it is going to pass this Chamber or not, fine with me. But we have to debate on this because right now, as had been established in that forum in Beijing during that conference, it is established that overpopulation is becoming to be a universal concern, not only of this country. But this country should be more urgently concerned on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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