

## **CHOOSING LIFE, REJECTING THE RH BILL** **(A Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines)**

Our Filipino Brothers and Sisters:

The State values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights (Art. II, Section 11). The State recognizes the sanctity of family life and shall protect and strengthen the family as a basic autonomous social institution. It shall equally protect the life of the mother and the life of the unborn from conception (Art. II, Section 12).

### **Background**

We begin by citing the Philippine Constitution. We do so because we intend to write you on the basis of the fundamental ideals and aspirations of the Filipino people and not on the basis of specifically Catholic religious teachings.

We are at a crossroads as a nation. Before us are several versions of a proposed bill, the Reproductive Health bill or sanitized as a Responsible Parenthood bill. This proposed bill in all its versions calls us to make a moral choice: to choose life or to choose death.

At the outset we thank the government for affording us an opportunity to express our views in friendly dialogue. Sadly our dialogue has simply revealed how far apart our respective positions are. Therefore, instead of building false hopes, we wish at the present time to draw up clearly what we object to and what we stand for.

### **Moral Choices at the Crossroads -- at EDSA I and Now**

Twenty five years ago in 1986 we Catholic Bishops made a prophetic moral judgment on political leadership. With this prophetic declaration we believe that we somehow significantly helped open the door for EDSA I and a window of political integrity.

Today we come to a new national crossroads and we now have to make a similar moral choice. Our President rallied the country with the election cry, "*Kung walang corrupt walang mahirap.*" As religious leaders we believe that there is a greater form of corruption, namely, moral corruption which is really the root of all corruption. On the present issue, it would be morally corrupt to disregard the moral implications of the RH bill.

This is our unanimous collective moral judgment: ***We strongly reject the RH bill.***

### **Commonly Shared Human and Cultural Values – Two Fundamental Principles**

Far from being simply a Catholic issue, the RH bill is a major attack on authentic human values and on Filipino cultural values regarding human life that all of us have cherished since time immemorial.

Simply stated the RH Bill does not respect moral sense that is central to Filipino cultures. It is the product of the spirit of this world, a secularist, materialistic spirit that considers morality as a set of teachings from which one can choose, according to the spirit of the age. Some it accepts, others it does not accept. Unfortunately, we see the subtle spread of this post-modern spirit in our own Filipino society.

***Our position stands firmly on two of the core principles commonly shared by all who believe in God:***

(1) *Human life is the most sacred physical gift with which God, the author of life, endows a human being. Placing artificial obstacles to prevent human life from being formed and being born most certainly contradicts this fundamental truth of human life. In the light of the widespread influence of the post-modern spirit in our world, we consider this position as nothing*

*less than prophetic. As religious leaders we must proclaim this truth fearlessly in season and out of season.*

*(2) It is parents, cooperating with God, who bring children into the world. It is also they who have the primary inalienable right and responsibility to nurture them, care for them, and educate them that they might grow as mature persons according to the will of the Creator.*

### **What We Specifically Object to in the RH Bill**

Advocates contend that the RH bill promotes reproductive health. The RH Bill certainly does not. It does not protect the health of the sacred human life that is being formed or born. The very name “contraceptive” already reveals the anti-life nature of the means that the RH bill promotes. These artificial means are fatal to human life, either preventing it from fruition or actually destroying it. Moreover, scientists have known for a long time that contraceptives may cause cancer. Contraceptives are hazardous to a woman’s health.

Advocates also say that the RH bill will reduce abortion rates. But many scientific analysts themselves wonder why prevalent contraceptive use sometimes raises the abortion rate. In truth, contraceptives provide a false sense of security that takes away the inhibition to sexual activity. Scientists have noted numerous cases of contraceptive failure. Abortion is resorted to, an act that all religious traditions would judge as sinful. “Safe sex” to diminish abortion rate is false propaganda.

Advocates moreover say that the RH bill will prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. This goes against the grain of many available scientific data. In some countries where condom use is prevalent, HIV/ AIDS continues to spread. Condoms provide a false security that strongly entices individuals towards increased sexual activity, increasing likewise the incidence of HIV/AIDS. “Safe sex” to prevent HIV /AIDS is false propaganda.

Advocates also assert that the RH Bill empowers women with ownership of their own bodies. This is in line with the post-modern spirit declaring that women have power over their own bodies without the dictation of any religion. How misguided this so-called “new truth” is! For, indeed, as created by God our bodies are given to us to keep and nourish. We are stewards of our own bodies and we must follow God’s will on this matter according to an informed and right conscience. Such a conscience must certainly be enlightened and guided by religious and moral teachings provided by various religious and cultural traditions regarding the fundamental dignity and worth of human life.

Advocates also say that the RH bill is necessary to stop overpopulation and to escape from poverty. Our own government statistical office has concluded that there is no overpopulation in the Philippines but only the over-concentration of population in a number of urban centers. Despite other findings to the contrary, we must also consider the findings of a significant group of renowned economic scholars, including economic Nobel laureates, who have found no direct correlation between population and poverty. In fact, many Filipino scholars have concluded that population is not the cause of our poverty. The causes of our poverty are: flawed philosophies of development, misguided economic policies, greed, corruption, social inequities, lack of access to education, poor economic and social services, poor infrastructures, etc. World organizations estimate that in our country more than P400 billion pesos are lost yearly to corruption. The conclusion is unavoidable: for our country to escape from poverty, we have to address the real causes of poverty and not population.

In the light of the above, we express our clear objections:

1. We object to the non-consideration of moral principles, *the bedrock of law*, in legislative discussions of bills that are intended for the good of individuals and for the common good.
2. We are against the anti-life, anti-natal and contraceptive mentality that is reflected in media and in some proposed legislative bills.

3. We object strongly to efforts at railroading the passage of the RH bill.
4. We denounce the over-all trajectory of the RH bill towards population control.
5. We denounce the use of public funds for contraceptives and sterilization.
6. We condemn compulsory sex education that would effectively let parents abdicate their primary role of educating their own children, especially in an area of life – sexuality – which is a sacred gift of God.

### **What We Stand For**

On this matter of proposed RH bills, these are our firm convictions:

1. We are deeply concerned about the plight of the many poor, especially of suffering women, who are struggling for a better life and who must seek it outside of our country, or have recourse to a livelihood less than decent.
2. We are pro-life. We must defend human life from the moment of conception or fertilization up to its natural end.
3. We believe in the responsible and natural regulation of births through Natural Family Planning for which character building is necessary which involves sacrifice, discipline and respect for the dignity of the spouse.
4. We believe that we are only stewards of our own bodies. Responsibility over our own bodies must follow the will of God who speaks to us through conscience.
5. We hold that on the choices related to the RH bill, conscience must not only be informed but most of all rightly guided through the teachings of one's faith.
6. We believe in the freedom of religion and the right of conscientious objection in matters that are contrary to one's faith. The sanctions and penalties embodied in the proposed RH bill are one more reason for us to denounce it.

### **Our Calls**

As religious leaders we have deeply and prayerfully reflected on this burning issue. We have unanimously made the moral judgment – to reject the RH agenda and to choose life.

1. We call for a fundamental transformation of our attitudes and behavior towards all human life especially the most defenseless, namely, human life being formed or being conceived. The cheapness with which many seem to consider human life is a great bane to our religious-oriented nation.
2. We call upon our legislators to consider the RH bill in the light of the God-given dignity and worth of human life and, therefore, to shelve it completely as contrary to our ideals and aspirations as a people. We thank our legislators who have filed bills to defend human life from the moment of conception and call upon all other legislators to join their ranks.
3. We thank the great multitude of lay people all over the country, and particularly the dedicated groups who made their presence felt in the halls of Congress, to defend and promote our position. We call upon other lay people and adherents of other religions to join the advocacy to defend and promote our commonly shared ideals and aspirations.
4. We call on our government to address effectively the real causes of poverty such as corruption, lack of social and economic services, lack of access to education and the benefits of development, social inequities.
5. We call for the establishment of more hospitals and clinics in the rural areas, the deployment of more health personnel to provide more access to health services, the building of more schools,

the provision of more aid to the poor for education, and the building of more and better infrastructures necessary for development.

6. We echo the challenge we prophetically uttered 25 years ago at EDSA I and call upon all people of good will who share our conviction: "...let us pray together, reason together, decide together, act together, always to the end that the truth prevail" over the many threats to human life and to our shared human and cultural values.

We commend our efforts against the RH bill (or the Responsible Parenthood bill – its new name) to the blessing of our almighty and loving God, from whom all life comes and for whom it is destined.

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

**+NEREO P. ODCHIMAR, D.D.**

Bishop of Tandag

President, CBCP

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