

All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (9.23 p.m.)—I am pleased to speak in the House this evening about a group in this parliament that I do not believe has received much attention and recognition for the work it does. I would like to take the opportunity this evening to promote that group and, also related to that group, to speak about a delegation that I had the great honour of leading to the Philippines in July. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development was formed to advance Australia's commitment to the aims of the 1994 Cairo program of action by providing a forum for discussion by members and senators of the Australian parliament on population development and reproductive health issues. The group organizes seminars for both parliamentarians and those in the community to hear experts speak on issues that are very important for economic prosperity and social cohesion.

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development organised a study tour to the Philippines in July which, as I have said, I had the great privilege of leading. The delegation that I had the opportunity to lead included the member for Charlton, who was the group's deputy leader, the member for Franklin and also members from state parliaments in Western Australia and South Australia. We also had the pleasure of the company of three members of three different countries in the Pacific: the Speaker of the House of the parliament of Kiribati; a member of the parliament of Tonga; and the Hon. Lady Carol Kidu from the Papua New Guinea government, a very distinguished individual indeed.

The delegation went to the Philippines with the charter or the opportunity to observe reproductive health, population development and environmental projects. We had the opportunity to meet with senators and representatives of governments and with local officials as well as village officials from various communities in the Philippines. The delegation was concerned that the national fertility rate in the Philippines is some five and nine times higher than in other parts of the Philippines, and this will double by 2030.

The group visited organisations and communities in Leyte, Cebu and Iloilo that are working to combat the effects of rapid population growth and environmental degradation through the provision of reproductive health services, microcredit projects, reforestation, replanting of mangroves and other opportunities.

The group expressed its strong praise for the leaders in the Philippines, like the mayors of Concepcion and Ajuy and the governor of Iloilo, who are working very strongly in effective partnership with NGOs to create sustainable communities.

Communities of course also take ownership of their projects and make very positive outcomes. The group is very strongly supportive of the partnerships that have been formed. I want to pay tribute to AusAID as well, because the contribution AusAID makes in the various developing countries of Asia and South-East Asia is often unheralded. In this case we had the opportunity of seeing some of the projects that AusAID funds in the Philippines.

This study tour also gave us the opportunity of developing some links with, as I said, three members of Pacific countries—Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Kiribati. All three members would confirm that their trip to the Philippines opened up their eyes to some of the challenges regarding population and environmental related issues and, of course, reproductive health. Personally, I am pleased to see how the Philippines, particularly at the local level, is addressing the serious challenges in population growth and the development issues that it confronts. As I said, this group consists of members across party lines; it is very bipartisan and very genuine in its interests in some of the issues that we looked at. Again I just want to compliment those who made the trip possible.

The Australian Reproductive Health Alliance sponsored the group. The trip was actually financed by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. A shoddy piece of journalism in the *Courier Mail* said that this trip was taxpayer funded; it was far from that. It was generously supported, as I said, by the Packard Foundation.