



MEDIA STATEMENT

29 July 2003

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ON THE RIGHT TRACK IN THE PHILIPPINES

Six Australian parliamentarians from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (APPGPD) and one parliamentarian from Tonga, Kiribati and Papua New Guinea have just completed a study tour of The Philippines organised by the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance with the support of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The Group has been observing reproductive health, population, development and environment projects and has also met with Senators, Representatives, Governors, Mayors and Barangay (village) Captains.

The Group is concerned that with a national fertility rate in The Philippines of around five and up to nine in some areas the population of The Philippines will double by 2029. We are supportive of efforts to address this unsustainable population growth.

The group visited organisations and communities in Leyte, Cebu and Iloilo 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 to curb declining fish stocks, HIV/AIDS education and information and youth support.

The Group expresses its high praise for those leaders - like the mayors of Concepcion and Ajuy and the Governor of Iloilo - who are working in very effective partnerships to create sustainable communities. Community owned projects with positive outcomes, like those we have seen, should be used as lighthouses – beacons that can be adapted by other communities to great success.

The Group is strongly supportive of the partnerships that have been formed between non-government organisations (NGOs), local government units (LGUs) and the community which are meeting the country's population and development commitments as set out in the Program of Action from the International Conference on Population and Development held in 1994.

Australian aid must be more appropriately targeted through NGOs and LGUs who have been so successful in addressing the challenges of population, development, reproductive health and the environment.

The Group is extremely disappointed and frustrated with the US decision to withdraw funding for the distribution of contraceptives in the Philippines and calls on the Australian government to bridge the gap.

The study tour has also opened up opportunities for collaboration between PNG, Tonga, Kiribati and the Philippines on population and environment issues.

We are pleased to see how the Philippines, particularly at the local level, is addressing the serious challenges in population growth and development issues and the Group is committed to supporting, cooperating and collaborating at all levels to make further advances in these areas.

We support the right of Filipino women to be better educated on issues of reproductive health and for them to be fully involved in decisions on these issues. We encourage the Philippine government to continue to promote and support reproductive health and population issues with appropriate legislative measures.

List of participants:

Kelly Hoare MP, Member for Charlton (Federal Parliament)
Michael Johnson MP, Member for Ryan (Federal Parliament)
Harry Quick MP, Member for Franklin (Federal Parliament)
Hon. Sandra Kanck MLC, Parliamentary Leader of Democrats (South Australian Parliament)
Bernie Masters MLA, Member for Vasse (West Australian Parliament)
John Hyde MLA, Member for Perth (West Australian Parliament)
Hon. Etera Teangana, Speaker of the House (Parliament of Kiribati)
Hon. Fineasi Funaki MP, (Parliament of Tonga)
Hon. Lady Carol Kidu MP, Minister for Social Welfare (Parliament of Papua New Guinea)