

KEYNOTE SPEECH FOR SECRETARY FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III MD, MSc. TO BE DELIVERED BY UNDERSECRETARY JADE DEL MUNDO for THE 2005 ANNUAL CONVENTION AND 59TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE PHILIPPINE OBSTETRICAL AND GYNECOLOGIC SOCIETY

October 25, 2005 (Tuesday, 11:30 AM)
Manila Intercontinental Hotel


Theme: Meeting the Challenges of Reproductive Health Issues

Greetings (VIPs)

Distinguished guests, my colleagues from our esteemed profession, good morning to everyone!

First of all, I would like to extend my Congratulations to the Philippine Obstetrical and Gynecological Society for their 59th Anniversary Celebration and this year's annual convention. It is a great pleasure for me to speak on behalf of our Secretary of Health, Francisco T. Duque III who, unfortunately cannot be with you today. He however sends all of you his sincere felicitations and wanted me to inform you that he'll be joining you during your closing ceremonies. He wishes to send you his message that he intends to work with you in this convention and beyond as we face the challenges of reproductive health issues in the 21st century...especially those relevant to the health of our women and children.

Indeed, we live in challenging times. Over a decade has passed since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was held in Cairo in 1994. This conference highlighted the basic foundations for improving women's health --- the provision of reproductive health services, bringing down infant and maternal mortality rates, and providing social rights to women such as education and health. Since then the scope of reproductive health has greatly broadened. The concerns that the world and our nation face now are definitely a lot different than when your Society started out 59 years ago. Reproductive health now spans family planning, safe motherhood, women's health care, HIV/AIDS, infertility, abortion, violence against women, and gender-sensitive health policies among others.

 It has also been 5 years since the Millenium Declaration laid down the targets and goals in poverty reduction, which were adopted by the member states of the United Nations. One of the most striking features of this Declaration was the singling out of maternal mortality as one of the key indicators for fighting poverty and achieving global development.

Our country is a signatory to both declarations and has been a strong supporter in popularizing the cause and principles of this global commitment. However, we are still faced with issues that relate to the efficiency, equity, and effectiveness in terms of delivering health care. Our maternal and infant mortality rates are still among the highest in our Region. 10 Filipino women are said to die every 24 hours from pregnancy-related causes. The current total fertility rate (TFR) of 3.5 is still higher than desired which leads us to an annual population growth rate that is above the world average rate (2.36% vs 1.89%).

We have had major efforts to address maternal health needs...to provide quality care for Filipino women and their children. However, the decline in the maternal mortality ratio during the past 10 years was not quite substantial. Maternal deaths still contributed 14% of the total deaths in women aged 15-49 years old with pregnancy complications accounting for most of these deaths. The lack of emergency obstetric care, the high incidence of high-risk pregnancies and

the lack or inadequate information and means to recognize and manage complications are known to have greatly contributed to the health and survival of mothers and their babies.

Hence, we continue to grapple with a host of reproductive health related issues on top of the other problems that pose serious threats to our commitment to make health accessible for all.

The Department of Health and the national government are intent on squarely meeting these challenges and determined to uplift the quality of health for our women. Our commitment to this goal is clearly expressed in our policies and actions.

- The Women's Health and Safe Motherhood Project is designed to improve the general well-being of the mother and the baby with emphasis on prenatal care and the risk approach. We refocused the safe Motherhood Policy in 2001 to consider all high-risk pregnancies so as to better address the unexpected complications during actual deliveries.
- The Philippine AIDS Prevention and Control Act of 1998 provides a robust legal framework for the national response to HIV-AIDS which is consistent with international best practices.
- Republic Act No 7192 otherwise known as the Women in Nation Building Act protects women's interests and promote their participation in development.
- Several landmark legislations were also passed in support of women's cause. Among these are the anti-rape law, the anti-trafficking law, and the anti-violence against women and children act of 2004.
- Another important landmark in the advocacy of reproductive health and reproductive rights is the current initiative of the DOH that pilot tests an intervention model integrating 4 reproductive health concerns: maternal care, family planning, STD and HIV, and adolescent and youth health. This intervention aims to reduce maternal mortality, increase contraceptive prevalence rate, protect the general population fro STD and HIV, and improve the reproductive health services to adolescents and youth at the ground level.

The real challenge however is not in implementing these policies and actions. It is in translating these initiatives into improved health outcomes for mothers and their infants and all of our women. It is not merely in beating down our statistics or bringing down numbers. Raising issues is definitely the first step...understanding them comes second...then comes our crystallized actions. We have to make that important connection between what we know about reproductive health issues and how we intend to use them to respond to the day-to-day needs of women and their children.

With this, I ask all of you to carry with us this important task of making motherhood safe and in bringing better reproductive health to our people.

Thank you very much.

