

A NATIONAL PERFDY

(This is a position paper presented by the Society of Catholic Social Scientists Philippines Chapter reacting to House Bills No.16, 2029, 2042 and 2550 in the Congress of the Philippines, which are measures to control population growth in the Philippines)

If there is anything notable about House Bills No. 16, 2029, 2042 & 2550, it is that they are outrageously pathetic and devoid of rationality.

They are trying to make a case for population curtailment using arguments that only succeed in showing that it is not population growth that is the problem, but bad governmental policies and skewed governance. From beginning to end, House Bill No. 16, deplors many things, as for instance, an enormous debt and debt service, an inefficient delivery of health services, an insufficient budget for education compared to our Asian neighbors, the dismal health conditions of our children, among other situations they cite. But are not these situations clear indications and admission of an inefficient government that is not giving the people the good governance they deserve? All bills fail to make the connection between population growth and underdevelopment. All bills are replete with inconsistencies and illogic, not to mention treacherous intentions, which invite the populace to question "Are these the representatives we elected, who cannot even think right about the problems of the nation?"

This paper will make a case against House Bills No. 16, 2029, 2042 and 2550 from three perspectives: from the point of view of economics; from the evidence of medical science; and from the point of view of reason (philosophical).

I. The Economic Viewpoint

Assertion 1. The House Bills above mentioned carelessly made the assertion that a larger population worsens poverty.

On the contrary, poverty incidence actually went down as our population got larger. Consider the Philippine experience from 1961 to 2000. During this period, our population increased almost *threefold*, from 27 million to 76 million. In the same period however, poverty incidence decreased. The Family Income and Expenditure Survey showed that the proportion of poor families decreased from 59% to 34% of all families in the country.

These same surveys showed that since 1985, poverty has decreased faster in urban areas (-13.2%) than in rural areas (-3.3%). It is true that poverty incidence increased from 32% in 1997 to 34% in 2000, but this increase was most likely due to the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

Assertion 2. The House Bills also asserted that higher population densities mean lower personal incomes.

We reply that evidence shows that thickly populated areas can exhibit higher incomes and greater economic activity. In the Philippines, the densely populated cities of Metro Manila, Cebu and Davao provide higher income opportunities, which serve as a “magnet” for attracting migrants from the provinces and other areas. These cities have higher personal incomes than the less densely populated regions.

The case is similar in other countries. For instance, there are countries such as Bolivia, Kenya and Ethiopia with lower population densities than the Philippines, yet they also have lower personal incomes. There are also countries with high population densities as well as high personal income like Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea.

The conclusion to be drawn from is evidence is that higher population densities do not necessarily lead to lower personal incomes.

Assertion 3. Another illogical assertion of the above-mentioned House bills is that higher population growth leads to lower economic growth.

We reply: Economic studies do not support this assertion. Nobel prize winner Simon Kuznets’ pioneering study in 1966 “*Modern Economic Growth: Rate, Structure and Spread*” (pp. 67-68) showed that “no clear association appears to exist in the present sample of countries, or is likely to exist in other developed countries, between rates of growth of population and of product per capita.”

Other studies confirmed Kuznets’ findings showing no clear link between population growth and economic growth (or poverty). Similar conclusions were reached in 1986 by the U.S. National Research Council and in 1992 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Consultative Meeting of Economists.

These studies are unable to show that population growth is a major direct cause of lower per capita GDP growth. Thus they provide no basis for a policy that aims to reduce population growth to raise per capita income growth.

So if population growth does not affect economic growth, what does? Good governance and well-implemented economic policies. These things usually get done in a climate of political and economic freedom. In his book *The Ultimate Resource*, Julian Simon gives evidence for the crucial role that political and economic systems play in economic growth when he compares three pairs of countries that had the same culture and history and practically the same standard before they split, before World War II: East and West Germany, North and South Korea, and Taiwan and China. In 1950, both the Communists and non-Communists had practically the same birthrates, and centrally planned economies had less population pressure than their market directed counterparts as measured by population per square meter. Yet, the economic growth of West Germany, South Korea and Taiwan was better than their counterparts' centrally planned economies. Due to faster economic growth, personal incomes in Taiwan and South Korea were roughly double China's and North Korea's respectively, while those in West Germany were more than 10% larger than in East Germany in the early 1980's.

We have just shown that the first three assertions are not supported by statistics and studies. In fact, poverty remains unaffected or decreases with a large and rapidly increasing population.

Assertion 4. Another erroneous statement without due statistical backing is the assertion that a larger population means more hungry and malnourished people.

On the contrary, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) statistics indicate that the food supply available for consumption has increased and the historical trend shows that it can continue to outpace population growth in the future. The FAO statistics in the Philippines from 1961 to 2002 show that the food supply available for consumption has also increased in three categories:

1. calories per person per day: from 1,745.0 to 2,379.3
2. grams of protein per person per day: from 40.6 to 56.1
3. grams of fat per person per day: from 28.7 to 48.4.

These national trends follow world trends. Based on food and nutrition statistics found in FAOSTAT, the online FAO Internet database, we find that from 1961 to 2002, available world food supply per person has gone up by 24.4%, and enough food is being produced for everyone on earth to enjoy a healthy diet. The FAO reports in *The*

State of Food and Agriculture 2003-2004: “Over the past two decades, progress has been made in reducing undernourishment in developing countries. The incidence of undernourishment has declined from 28 percent of the population two decades ago to 17 percent according to data from 1999-2001.”

These trends of food supply outpacing population growth clearly prove Ester Boserup’s point in her 1965 book *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth*: that it is population growth that causes increases in food production and not the other way around. Her argument can be paraphrased as follows: Population growth puts pressure on communities who acquire food through hunting and gathering, slash-and-burn farming methods, and other inefficient methods to adopt more efficient ones such as plowing with livestock and multi-cropping. As populations grow, towns develop and people can specialize in other non-farming production activities. This is the result of farmers being pressured by a growing population to produce more food, with more efficient methods, to serve a larger demand.

If the statistics show that food supply is adequate to give every Filipino a healthy diet, why are some families still eating less? For instance, FAO’s *The State of Food and Agriculture 2003-2004* shows the incidence of undernourished people in the Philippines to be 22% in 1999-2001, lower than the 26% recorded in 1990-1992. The FAO argues in their report *Agriculture: Towards 2015/2030 that families that are eating less have heads that are not able to get good paying jobs to pay for food. Or they live in poor, isolated communities dependent on agriculture and are unable to raise local agricultural production to meet their food needs.*

In some cases, it may, in fact, be sparse population that makes it difficult for people to access food supplies. This was the case of the famine in Sahel, West Africa in the 1970’s. Because of the region’s low population density, not enough roads and transport services were available in the area. In the case of the Philippines, families need to pay higher food prices due to wastages that can be avoided if there were more food processing and storage facilities. Food prices are also higher due to a fragmented transportation system.

Assertion 5. Then the House Bills assert that a larger population means less funding for education.

People get worried about this one because in a growing population, government funds may not be sufficient to provide the education needed by their citizens. Poorly educated citizens will be ill-prepared to compete in the global marketplace and thus would earn

smaller wages for their families. But the findings in a 1994 World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, prepared by Lant Pritchett of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, should put this worry to rest. In this study, he finds that *there is no correlation between population growth and years of schooling.*

On the practical side, the worry here is where the government is going to get the money to cover the estimated 18,000-classroom backlog (which means building 3,000 classrooms a year for six years). Based on figures taken from the Department of Education's Adopt-A-School Project, the cost of a two-story classroom building (a classroom, multipurpose room and a computer lab) with sanitary facilities and 15 computers, is estimated to be P2.5 million. Thus, covering the backlog will cost 7.5 billion (B) a year. We should see this yearly amount as a long-term investment that can turn Filipino children into more productive citizens in 25 years.

But how can the government raise the necessary funds? It can, among other things, reduce tax evasion and corruption. In a 2001 report prepared by the Tax Study Group of the Development Budget Coordinating Committee, the government lost P193.7B in evaded taxes. In 1997, the Office of the Ombudsman estimated that the government lost \$48B in the past 20 years. Translated into an annual figure using an exchange rate of P55 for every \$1, this amounts to P132B. The P7.5B needed to build 3,000 classrooms every year represents only 3.9% of the estimated tax evasion or only 5.7% of the losses due to corruption. Considering the long-term social impact of building 3,000 classrooms every year, there is no reason for the government to skimp on its effort to improve tax collection and clean up the bureaucracy so that it can generate the funds needed to support vital programs, such as building classrooms.

Moreover, knowing that the proper nurture, nutrition and schooling of an additional child today for 25 years leads to a productive citizen that benefits society for 45 to 50 years should be a good enough reason for firms, families, nongovernmental organizations and government to work together to deliver the public programs and private initiatives to make sure these investments in people take place.

A review of the last two assertions shows that when poverty exists, it is not due to a larger population or a fast growing one, but rather it is caused by a lack of transportation and communications systems, poor tax collections, and corruption. The next three assertions continue to add more evidence on how little population growth affects poverty.

Assertion 6. Our population will double in 29 years.

We shouldn't worry about this at all. First, the mere fact that our population is growing means that people are living longer. Second, our growth rate is not out of control, for it is actually expected to go down thanks to the fact that parents rationally adjust their family size based on the child mortalities and economic opportunities they have. Third, we are far from reaching a "standing room only" situation since we can fit the 2050 population of the Philippines into Luzon with a population density that is less than one-tenth the 2000 density of Metro Manila.

What people don't realize about an increasing population is that it is caused by fewer babies dying and more people living longer. Peter Bauer has written: "Clearly, the much-deplored population explosion should be seen as a blessing rather than a disaster, because it stems from a fall in mortality, a *prima facie* improvement in people's welfare, not a deterioration." For instance, infant mortality rates in the Philippines (number of deaths per 1,000 births between birth and up to age one year) have gone down from 134.4 in 1950-1955 to 34.4 in 1995-2000 and further down to 29 in 2002. Life expectancies from birth have increased from 47.8 years in 1950-1955 to 68.6 years in 1995-2000.

What about the assertion of a "runaway" growth rate and a "standing room only" scenario in the future? Let's examine the first worry. There have been findings that point out that the Philippine population will reach 166 million in 2033, double the 83 million in 2004. This figure is way above the UN high-variant projection of 130 million for 2033. Why the wide difference? On one hand, the "population doubles" projection assumes that the 1995-2000 annual population growth rate of 2.36% will hold steady for the next 29 years. On the other hand, the UN high variant projection assumes that these growth rates will come down from 1.98% in 2000-2005 to 1.20% in 2030-2035, and 0.92% in 2045-2050. The latter assumption seems to be a more reasonable one since Philippine annual population growth rates have been decreasing: from 3.06% in 1948-1960 down to 2.36% in 1995-2000. (This decrease in population growth reflects the decrease in total fertility rates [number of births per woman] from 7.13 in 1955-1960 to 3.64 in 1995-2000.) This difference in growth assumptions explains why the UN 2033 population projection for the Philippines is 36 million less than the expected "doubled population." Even by 2050, the UN projected population of 154 million would still be 12 million shy of it.

People who think that population growth rates remain unchanged are actually thinking the way Malthus did in the first edition of his book *An Essay on the Principles of Population* that was published in 1798. His famous “theory” of population, which led to economics being called the “dismal science” because of his pessimistic prognosis, can be paraphrased as follows: Population increases faster than food supply until the standard of living falls to subsistence levels.

But what most people, including the followers of Malthus, have not heard or read much about is that beginning with the second edition of this essay, published in 1803 (there were six editions in all), Malthus’s theory took an optimistic turn. Based on observations made in his travels to Germany, Russia, and Scandinavia, he concluded that persons were capable of “moral restraint” or voluntary abstinence that enabled them to avoid the misery that comes with increases in population and thus was more optimistic that food supply would keep pace with the population. In other words, parents have the foresight to choose their family size according to current child mortality rates and economic opportunities. Population growth could actually slow down due to the rational decisions of persons and not through the natural, albeit more painful, checks of famine and disease that Malthus identified in the first edition of his essay.

How about the worry that a rapid population growth rate will result in a “standing room only” situation? We shouldn’t be worried about this at all. We can fit all the people in the world today (6.396 billion) in the island of Luzon alone, with each person getting 16 square meters of living space. If people want more space, we can put all of them in the area consisting of the adjacent states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, where each person would have 264 square meters. The rest of the world could then be used for producing food and other needs of people. The population density in this world “bedroom community” would be about 3,783 persons per square kilometer (ppsk)—much less than the population densities of Baguio City (5,161 ppsk), Iloilo City (6,533 ppsk) and Marawi City (5,800 ppsk) as of the year 2000. What about the 154 million Filipinos that the UN Population Division says will be around in 2050? If each of them had the same living space as in the world “bedroom community,” they can be easily housed in the island of Luzon with over three-fifths of the island free for roads, parks, and farms. By that time, Luzon’s population density (1,473 ppsk) would still be less than one-tenth that of Metro Manila’s (15,617 ppsk) in 2000.

Assertion 7. One other assertion in these bills is that larger families are poor families.

This is true. It has been found in the year 2000 by the National Statistics Office that there was an increase in poor families as family size increased.

Nonetheless, it would be poor judgment on our part to use this observation as a basis for limiting the family size of poor people for two reasons. First, *finding that increasing family size is associated with increasing incidence of poor families does not prove that a larger family size is what makes a family poor.* The more likely reason why some families are poor is the limited schooling of the household head. In fact, 78% to 90% of the poor households in each family size had heads with no high school diploma. In other words, poor families are poor not because they are large but because most of their heads have limited schooling which prevents them from getting well paying jobs.

This finding that poor families have heads that lack schooling confirms the results of the 2002 Balisacan and Pernia study on poverty incidence in Philippine regions: the provision of education, hand in hand with roads, helps reduce poverty. In other words, persons can take full advantage of their education only if they have access to jobs that pay good wages and to markets that pay good prices for the goods they produce. The study also showed that agrarian reform and irrigation alleviate poverty. This finding makes sense, especially in regions where agriculture is dominant. In his 2001 paper on Philippine poverty, Balisacan showed that poverty is mainly a rural phenomenon, and nearly two-thirds of the rural poor work in the agricultural sector.

Moreover, finding that larger families are usually poor cannot be used as a basis to conclude that poor parents cannot control and do not consider the consequences of their procreative capacities. For Lant Pritchett, of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, has found that 90% of the variation in actual fertility rates can be accounted for by variations in desired fertility rates. In other words, parents who have large families want large families; parents want the children that they actually beget. This study confirms what Malthus wrote in the 2nd and subsequent editions of *An Essay on the Principles of Population*, that parents exercise the moral restraint in choosing the family size based on the economic situation and child mortalities they face. Summarizing what was explained in assertion number 6, we can reasonably conclude that married couples, both rich and poor, have the foresight and self-control to engender the number of children that suits their lifestyle and incomes.

The review of these seven assertions has shown that poverty is usually unaffected or decreases with a large, fast-growing population, and if it exists, it is usually caused by bad governance and economic policies instead of high population levels and growth rates. Moreover, it has been shown that our population is experiencing neither a “runaway” nor an uncontrolled growth rate. History shows that it has been decreasing and is expected to continue to decrease in the future.

Assertion 8: Instituting a two-child population policy will significantly reduce poverty.

Implementing a two-child policy will not hasten the economic growth that is needed to reduce poverty because it was shown in the review of the earlier assertions that (1) population growth has no direct effect on economic growth or poverty and (2) population growth will naturally slow down as parents exercise moral restraint in adjusting their family sizes based on lower infant mortality rates and current economic opportunities.

Moreover, implementing this population-control policy will put the country on a practically irreversible course of population decline and aging, the consequences of which we would want to avoid. Instead of implementing a two-child policy, we should focus our efforts on reaping a possible demographic dividend—a stage in a population where potential workers support relatively fewer numbers of child and elderly dependents—by educating our people for well-paid jobs and attracting the investments needed to generate the additional jobs for the 1.1-1.2 million entrants into the workforce each year.

Aside from having shown that population growth has no direct causal effect on economic growth and poverty and that population growth will not remain at current rates but will actually decrease, the two-child ideal family size is flawed for three reasons.

First, measures of unmet need, which are used to estimate desired fertility and ideal family size, are unreliable. Lant Pritchett, a development economist at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, pointed out in 1994 that the figure for “unmet need” for contraception lumps together all women who might not want a child immediately and are not using contraception. These women, however, would include those who may be infertile, those who may be sexually inactive, and those who may have moral reasons not to use contraceptive drugs or devices even if they were available.

Second, unmet need plays a relatively small role in explaining the actual fertility of women. Pritchett (1994) found that the “desired levels of fertility account for 90% of the differences across countries in total fertility rates.” In other words, couples have large families because they want large families. It makes perfect sense, for example, that Filipino farmers may want large families because they want more hands to help them on the farm, as well as children who can take care of them in their old age.

Third, implementing a two-child policy as part of a population management program sets the country on a course of population decline and aging that it would want to avoid since it would be difficult to reverse. Here’s why: Joseph Chamie, Director of the UN Population Division, in a paper presented to the Population Association of America in April 2004 says: “Sixty countries—about one-third of the countries in the world—have period fertility rates below 2.1; and half of those countries have levels of 1.5 or less.” Fertility rates below the replacement rate of 2.1 mean that these countries will eventually experience the decline and aging of their populations. Here are the projected population declines from 2003-2050 of the following countries: Russia and Japan, 26-27 million; Germany, 15 million; Italy and Poland, 4-5 million; South Korea, 4 million; and Taiwan, 0.5 million. In the same paper, Chamie presents a table showing that 28 of the 60 countries with below-replacement fertility rates are implementing programs to raise fertility rates.

It cannot be overemphasized that the countries currently experiencing below-replacement rates started on this path with a two-child policy. Acting in his personal capacity, Chamie concludes in this paper that the efforts of countries to raise fertility rates will not be enough to bring them back to replacement levels. Thus, the Philippines should learn from the experience of countries that are now trying to raise their fertility rates, after using a two-child policy to reduce them, by not adopting the two-child policy at all.

Instead of implementing a two-child population policy, we should focus our efforts on cashing in on a possible “demographic dividend.” A chance to reap a demographic dividend exists when a previously fast-growing population decreases its growth rate (it was noted earlier that the UN projects that the 2.36% annual growth rate in 1995-2000 will go down to 0.92% in 2045-2050) and thus results in the labor force growing faster than the dependent (thus economically unproductive) population of children and elderly. In other words, the population is in a phase where the potential workforce (population aged 15-64 years) is supporting a relatively smaller number of

dependents (population aged 0-14 years [child dependents] and 65 years and over [elderly dependents]). If the proper policies are in place during this demographic stage, then the expected increase in savings and labor supply can be harnessed to sustain rapid economic growth that reduces poverty.

To reap this demographic dividend over the next 35 years, what needs to be done is to educate these potential workers to prepare them to get good jobs and to implement policies that would attract the investments needed to generate well-paying jobs that would match the projected annual addition of 1.1-1.2 million workers to the potential workforce.

II. The Medical Viewpoint

Nature can never be violated, hampered, or transgressed without having to pay the consequences. Collateral damage due to intervention must always be expected.

A recent case of an abuse and violation of nature is the man-made disaster that hit our eastern coastal municipalities of Infanta, Real, and Gen. Nakar in the 1st district of Quezon province, where massive mudslides covered those towns and destroyed them. The cause of this was found to be the inundation of the forest and the inordinate cutting of trees.

In the same manner, the kind of medicine one takes to treat certain ailments in the human body affects the other parts of the body not connected with the ailment being treated. For example, medicine taken for hypertension affects the efficiency of the kidney and other internal organs in the long run, or medicine taken to destroy cancer cells in chemotherapy also destroys the good cells around the growth.

Contraceptive pills are among the drugs that have serious collateral damage on a woman's healthy body. Some of them are not only contraceptives, but are in fact, abortifacients. The ingestion of contraceptive pills has been found to cause cancer, nervous disorders, and internal organ damage. This is to be expected inasmuch as serious organic dysfunctions set in when pills are taken when one is not even sick.

It is appalling, then, that the proponents of the House bills above-mentioned can speak of women's rights in their advocacy for the use of contraceptive devices and other artificial birth-control methods (like sterilization, for both men and women, the use of diaphragms, etc.), when those rights undeniably mean only the right to be spayed, destroyed, or killed.

There is universal evidence that women who contracepted became unhappy and restless creatures, despite the sexual satisfaction they purport to enjoy.

III. An Argument from Reason

A consideration of the nature of man will show that man is not the “owner” of his own life. Observe that at one point, he does not exist; then at another point, he begins to exist. Then, at some later point in his life, he ceases to exist. Note that in the points when he begins to exist and ceases to exist, man does not exercise any volition or willing whatsoever. He enters this world without his having a say about it, and he leaves this world without his willing it.

These truths point to one thing only. Man does not have a say about the beginning and ebbing of his own life. Life is clearly not a province he can decide upon. He can always try to extend his life by medical help or can seek the bowels of the earth to prolong his stay on it. But all of these grand efforts ultimately come to naught because his life is not really up to him. He has to go, when he has to go, as dictated by the Giver and Creator of life itself, and this can never be postponed.

This being the case, man therefore cannot usurp the rights that clearly belong only to the Creator. He who gives life is the only one who can take it, and He governs it. This is pure reason. Man becomes a usurper and treads on very dangerous grounds when he attempts to play “God” and dictates the begetting of life and its ending.

Only the Creator can create life, and He does this through a process that does not require Him to materialize before man and say “let there be life,” and there was life. By His divine wisdom and power He designed and incorporated in man’s body specific organs and faculties which, when used, will provide the setting and environment for Him to infuse life. One considers the simple meeting of the female egg (which only comes out at specific times) and the male’s sperm, which sets off the fertilization of the egg: a simple innocuous event, but one which is immediately acknowledged by the Creator by His infusion of life. This is the manner by which God creates life, after our first parents.

Now, when man decides that he only wants the enjoyment of the marital act but not all the results thereof, he is committing a grave wrong because the marital act was designed purposely by the Creator for the begetting of children. Sexual intercourse, even with one’s legitimate spouse, is a grave moral wrong if it is not open to life.

There are legitimate reasons, however, for not wanting to have big families. In those situations, couples are advised to plan their families without transgressing the moral norms.

In the course of history, many men and women transgressed the moral norms governing the exercise of the marital act. They could not quietly dispel the qualms of conscience that they have experienced in their transgression, so they decided to make their own rules to justify their failings. They concocted ideas like “sexual liberation,” “freedom to choose what they want to do with their bodies,” “reproductive health,” “gender equality,” etc., all of which simply mean that they do not want to toe the line of the Natural Law in the matter of their sexuality. Simply put, it is actually putting one over on the Creator in a matter that only He has absolute authority over, and this is LIFE.

This paper will rest its case and remove all objections to the House bills above mentioned if any one of the proponents of those bills can say truthfully that they can exercise absolute control over the ebbing of their own lives. If they cannot do this, then allow us to say: lay off the issue of LIFE because it is not, nor will it ever be, your province after all.

To insist upon your bills will not only be a serious moral wrong, it will also be, on a grand scale, a national perfidy.

Notes

1. Data are taken from a study made by Dr. Bernardo M. Villegas, Dr. Roberto de Vera, et al. of the University of Asia and the Pacific's School of Economics. 12 October 2004.