

Headline	Philippine senators scold minister over plan to buy condoms	Language	English
Date	07 Oct 2010	Page No	L-16
MediaTitle	New Sabah Times English (KK)	Article Size	88 cm²
Section	World	Color	Black/white
Journalist	N/A	ADValue	171
Frequency	Daily	PRValue	512
Circ / Read	23,655 /		



Philippine senators scold minister over plan to buy condoms

MANILA: Senior Philippine senators on Wednesday scolded government health officials over a plan to use taxpayer money to buy condoms and other contraceptives to curb the high birth rates in slums.

"If you want to use a condom, buy your own. Why let the government pay for it?" Senate Majority Leader Vicente Sotto told reporters after attending a public hearing on the proposed 2011 national budget.

Health Secretary Enrique Ona had testified at the hearing that the health ministry was seeking 400 million pesos (9 million dollars) to buy contraceptives for the poor next year.

"I will move for the (budget) cut of the contraceptives. All of it," said Sotto.

Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile echoed Sotto's sentiments.

"I might have to cut that. I

will cut family planning... condoms, pills and injectable material. We will remove all of that," he said.

Enrile said the money allocated for birth control could instead be used to help government hospitals and to control diseases such as malaria and leprosy.

Ona argued at the hearing that the eight million pesos allocated for condoms would also help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, but Sotto said

the population explosion issue was merely a myth.

Contraceptives have become a heated issue in the Philippines in recent days after President Aquino declared last month his government would provide contraceptives to poor couples who need them.

This enraged the dominant Roman Catholic church which bans the use of contraceptives. Bishops suggested Aquino could be excom-

municated and warned of street protests if he pushed through with plan.

The bishops are often seen as providing moral guidance from the pulpit and remain politically influential with 80 percent of the population belonging to the Catholic faith.

Aquino, a practising Catholic, won the May presidential elections by a landslide and took office in June on an anti-corruption agenda.

Despite church opposition, an independent national survey in January found that as many as 68 percent of voters believed that government should provide couples with all legal means of family planning.

The Philippines estimates its 2010 population at 94.01 million, up from 76.5 million in the 2000 census, making it the 12th most populous nation in the world. - AFP