



PHILIPPINES

STATEMENT

OF

H.E. MR. HILARIO G. DAVIDE, JR.

Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Philippines
to the United Nations in New York

at the

Lunch Briefing on ***The Inherent Right to Life: The First and Most
Fundamental Human Right***

sponsored by the NGO ***Focus on the Family***
and the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See
and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Philippines

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Distinguished colleagues,
Honorable Christopher Smith,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely happy to be here with you today – less than two days before Valentines Day, the day of *Love* and of lovers. When we speak of *Love*, we speak of *Life*. There can be no love without life. There can be no life without *Love*. Those who believe in God know that **God is Life and God is Love**.

Thus, this lunch briefing on the topic: “***The Inherent Right to Life: the First and Most Fundamental Human Right***,” is very timely. It is made more timely and relevant because of the continuing debate on the issues of abortion and of the question of the imposition of the death penalty.

I congratulate the ***Focus on the Family*** for sponsoring this event. This is my third time with it for its briefings on transcendental issues concerning human rights. The first was on 10 December 2008, on the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and the second was on 27 May 2009, on the importance of marriage, family and human rights as essential foundation of nations.

Those who attended the first two briefings and who are now here with us may easily notice that we have moved deeper into human rights from an articulation now of who is “human”, and, therefore, what is “human life”. This is literally a question of the ages. Great minds have contemplated on and attempted to articulate the answer. New great minds may continue the search to find the answer.

But, for the simple man – like me – who believes in God, loves Him and fears Him, the one single universal answer was made since the time of creation. Let me just restate what I said in the last two briefings by the ***Focus on the Family***. The Genesis of the Old Testament tells us that “God created man in his own image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.” The Christian faith also tells us that each one of us is a temple of God and that God’s spirit dwells in that temple; and God’s temple is holy (Corinthians 3:16).

In his encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae* or the *Gospel of Life* (68-69), His Holiness Pope John Paul II pronounces in part:

Man's life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the *sole Lord of this life*: man cannot do with it as he wills...

Human life and death are thus in the hands of God, in his power. "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of mankind," exclaims Job (12:10). "The Lord brings to death and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Sam. 6). He alone can say: "It is I who bring both death and life." (Dt. 32:39).

Thus, in the fifth of His Ten Commandments God commands: you shall not kill (Exo. 20:13).

It follows then that the right to life is the first and most fundamental human right. It is in fact, the source or the beginning of all human rights. It is the most fundamental because without it, of what use or benefit would the other rights be? His Holiness Pope John Paul II puts it more eloquently in *Evangelium Vitae*, thus: "Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial state and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence." (4).

The Charter of the United Nations speaks of re-affirmation of "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person". The Universal Declaration of Human Rights opens with "a recognition of the inherent dignity... of all members of the human family", and its Article 3 enshrines the right of "Everyone to life, liberty and security". Therefore, it is abundantly clear that God is the cornerstone of these instruments, and the protection, promotion and enhancement of **the right to life** are their sacred charge. Since the Member States approved and proclaimed these instruments, respectively, they remain solemnly bound by its letter and spirit.

The Declaration of Independence of our host country, the United States of America, proclaims not just the word God, but also Creator and Divine Providence. In its dollar bills and coins, the US announces its faith: "*In God we Trust*." The Government and the people of the US know by heart what these stand for.

Some may consider it a political sacrilege for governments and public servants to bring faith and government service together as tempting the violation of separation of church and State.

I say, however, that, we cannot escape the notion that a State has its own morals and values. For one, it is the nature of the State to preserve itself. We realize that the community cannot exist without the *life* of the individual. To preserve itself, the interest of the State is to protect first and foremost the sanctity of individual life.

Translating these value and social morality into the interest of the State was not a great jump for the Philippines. The Philippines recognizes the State's interest in the protection of all life. It retains the text of a 1930 Penal Code, derived from the Spanish *Codigo Penal*, the crime of abortion and assisted suicides. Its Civil Code recognizes that a child conceived is considered "born" for purposes favorable to it. The 1935, 1973 and 1987 Constitutions of the Philippines recognize the right to life under the due process and equal protection clause. "Divine Providence" is mentioned in the first, and "Almighty God" is mentioned in the second and the third.

Then, after our own horror of human rights abuses during WW II, the Philippines became a founding Member of the United Nations and one of the first fifty which signed the Charter. The Philippines is one of the architects of the UDHR.

The 1987 Constitution of the Philippines expresses the strongest commitment to the right to life. It solemnly declares the State policy to value the dignity of every human person and guarantee full respect for human rights (Article II, Sec. 11) and to "equally protect the life of the mother and the life of the unborn from conception" (Art. II, Sec. 12). Thus, the Philippines openly recognizes rights of the unborn, whatsoever its status in the scientific world. It follows then that abortion is prohibited. And since abortion is committed against a life that is incapable of defending itself, a life that is equally incapable of committing a crime, abortion is a most heinous offense. It is worse than murder. It is a blatant violation of the fifth commandment of God. Yet, what an incomprehensible contrast: some Governments condemn violations of other human rights but allow this most heinous offense against God and man.

I do not believe that the sentiments I have just expressed are lost or divested from the politics of the international democratic community. For

example, on the issue of abortion, whatever the rhetoric, States have somehow recognized that life exists from conception. In the ICCPR, despite the forbearance of the death penalty, the absolute prohibition against the execution of pregnant women remains. Together with all other indignant expressions of horror at the abuse of pregnant women, their use as weapons of war, and that indescribable sense of added loss, States have articulated some underlying knowledge that the violence and death of a pregnant woman is an injury or loss of two individuals, not one.

We must be able to look to and encourage expressions like these that reveal and uncover those links among the human family. It moves us towards fulfilling our pledge in the UDHR to attain common understanding of fundamental human rights, and protecting and promoting the **right to life**.

Moving forward may be slow. But, we must move with all courage we can muster. Democracies arise and forever reconstruct themselves, learning new ways to express democracy. We must therefore not only endeavor to keep up with ourselves, but also with each other, to share laws and jurisprudence and, more holistically and deeply, to discover each other's faith, culture, and communal values. From there, we may one day find language that articulates our knowledge and belief that the right to life breathes life to all freedoms.

I thank you.