

Philippine president approves contraceptives law

December 29 2012, by Oliver Teves

(AP)—The Philippine president has signed a law that will promote contraception, sexual education and family planning programs vigorously opposed by the country's Roman Catholic Church.

President Benigno Aquino III signed the [law](#) on Dec. 21 and his administration announced it only Saturday because of the "sensitivity" of the issue, said deputy presidential spokeswoman Abigail Valte.

Valte said the passage of the law "closes a highly divisive chapter of our history" and "opens the possibility of cooperation and reconciliation" among those who oppose and support the "Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012."

One of the most outspoken opponents of the legislation while it was still being debated in Congress, retired Archbishop Oscar Cruz, said Aquino is dividing the country while adopting a "first world country value system." He warned that the law will be followed by the passage of a divorce bill and same-sex marriage, both strongly opposed by the Church.

Cruz, a former president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, criticized the secret signing of the law despite the presidential certification that it was an urgent measure.

"What is that? He is either ashamed of it or he is afraid of the repercussion of that bill," Cruz said.

"My first objection there is why don't you call a spade a spade? Why do you have to call it 'reproductive health?' Come on. That is population-control legislation," he said. "From the onset there is already deception."

He said responsible parenthood as taught by the church entails using only natural [family planning](#) methods. Providing artificial contraceptives will "separate pleasure from the hardship" of bringing up a family.

"This government has now entered the bedroom bringing with it the condom and the pill.... That is very irresponsible," Cruz said.

He said a Catholic group is planning to question the law at the Supreme Court.

Women's groups and other supporters of the law have praised Aquino for pushing its passage within the first half of his six-year term after the measure languished in Congress for 13 years largely because legislators were reluctant to pass it because of the strong opposition of the Catholic Church.

The Aquino administration "should be commended for its political will to see this law through," said Carlos Conde, Asia Researcher for the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch.

Conde said the law "will advance human rights in the Philippines, particularly of women and mothers" and empower them to make their own decisions over their health and family life. "It gives a clear mandate to the government to make reproductive health services readily available and, because of that, the law can save many lives," he said.

In about a dozen provisions, the 24-page law repeatedly reminds that abortion drugs are banned, but it requires health workers to provide care for those who have complications arising from illegal abortions.

Under the law, the government will hire more village health workers who will distribute contraceptives, especially to the poor, and provide instructions on natural family planning methods that the Church approves.

The government will also train teachers who will provide age- and development-appropriate [reproductive health](#) education to adolescents—youth age 10 to 19 years old. This will include information on protection against discrimination and sexual abuse and violence against women and children, teen pregnancy, and women's and children's rights.

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