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ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Archbishop Paciano Aniceto, President of Bishops' Commission on Family and Life, responds to press accusations: “Presidential candidates should be clear on respect for life.”

Manila (Agenzia Fides) – "Presidential candidates should be clear on the issues that concern the respect for life and family. If they call themselves Catholics, there can be no dichotomy between the faith and the public service to which they are called." This is what Archbishop Paciano Aniceto of San Fernando, President of the Bishops' Commission on Family and Life, said in an interview with Agenzia Fides. The Commission published, in late 2009, a “Catechism on Family and Life for the 2010 Elections,” that outlines the Church's position and asks leaders to “cultivate morality, enlightened by faith," and thus, not supporting laws that violate the right to life and rights of families.

The document has generated wide debate in the press, in public opinion, and in politics in the Philippines in this intense phase of the electoral campaign that precedes presidential elections next May. The Catechism, in particular, has had the effect of "forcing" presidential candidates to express an opinion for or against a piece of legislation being debated in the Philippines Congress: the Reproductive Health Bill.

The bill aims at legalizing and promoting practices such as abortion and contraception among young people as a means of birth control in the Philippines. Recently, the Filipino Congress, given the sensitivity of the matter and the divisions in public opinion declined to consider and vote on the law, postponing it until after the election. This measure of Congress has caused strong reactions in the press, which has viciously attacked the Catholic Church, accused by the leading Philippine newspaper, “The Philippine Daily Inquirer,” of being "unjust and immoral in itself," trying to impose a moral on the nation, and trying to limit the freedom of citizens and prevent population control.

Archbishop Aniceto has told Agenzia Fides of the answers to these accusations, which will appear in a public statement: "We have repeatedly condemned injustice and immorality, both in public life and in the Church. We have repeatedly spoken out against corruption and called for transparency in politics, especially in view of the elections. Today, the issue of so-called 'sexual and reproductive health' is a new national political agenda and it demands a clear response from the Church and from those in public office. We intend to continue forward and present the Filipino people with the guidelines of the Social Doctrine of the Church. We want to expose the pitfalls in the text of the law being debated in Congress and the pressures being made on the Philippines in this area from some UN agencies and from the United States, who favor means of population control that violate the right to life. We want to inform citizens on this delicate matter of conscience that needs the light of faith." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 5/2/2010)

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