

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Extreme Northern Luzon, Bicol region and the eastern sections of Visayas and Mindanao will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms. The rest of the country will be partly cloudy to at times cloudy with isolated rainshowers or thunderstorms.

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Breast-feeding campaign not a lonely battle

By Christian V. Esguerra

THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT'S campaign against giant milk formula companies is anything but a lonesome battle.

Around 50 nongovernment organizations have banded together into a nationwide coalition to help promote breast-feeding and implement the revised implementing rules and regulations of the new Milk Code.

Together, the alliance dubbed "People of the Philippines to Protect Breast Feeding" boasts of 5,000 individuals committed to campaigning against multinational infant formula companies, according to convenor Ines Fernandez.

"We're sick and tired of the promotional gimmicks of these companies," she told the INQUIRER by phone yesterday. "We are all being fooled."

The establishment of the coalition was a welcome development for the government which recently stood firm on implementing Executive Order No. 51 or the Milk Code—at least on paper.

In a letter, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III sought to correct supposed misimpressions by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America on the Milk Code.

He told chamber president Thomas Donahue that the revised IRR of the executive order sought to regulate milk formula advertising up to 24 months or two years—not three years as Donahue had claimed in a letter to President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Duque also stood firm on the provision requiring milk companies to

put up labels warning that their products "may" contain life-threatening bacteria like "enterobacter sakazakii" and "salmonella."

The provision was consistent with the findings of experts from the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization, he told Donahue in the letter.

The new alliance hoped to boost the government position by campaigning for breast-feeding through its member organizations scattered around the country, according to Fernandez, executive director of the advocacy group Arugaan.

Among the members are the Action for Economic Reform, Zoto Community-based Health, Popular Education for People's Empowerment, Medical Action Group, and the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, she said.

"We are ready to transform bottle-feeding moms to relactate, bringing back the power to breast-feed especially for babies aged below six months," she wrote in an e-mail to the INQUIRER.

Several studies around the world apparently show the inherent efficacy and advantage of breast milk over infant formula products.

Dr. Jean Marc Olive, WHO country representative, earlier briefed a congressional committee on the benefits of breast-feeding. He warned that babies who were not breast-fed were 10 times more likely to die of diarrhea, 3.6 times more likely to die of pneumonia, and 2.5 times more likely to suffer from other infections.

Lawy to al

By Alcuin Papa

VICTIMS OF THE dictatorship could get a total \$2,000 each as Christmas—provided the Philippine government waives its right to a US court decision of \$35 million of disputed cos funds to them.

Robert Swift, the US-based lawyer for the victims, told a press conference yesterday the lawyers were "in the details" for the distribution of \$2,000 to 7,500 eligible victims of the dictatorship, which Hawaii Judge Manuel L. O'Connell ordered transferred to a US trust.

According to Rod Domingo, a lawyer for the rights abuse victims could get the money as early as two weeks from now, before Christmas. He said the lawyers are working with local banks to make sure the checks issued to the victims will be cashed.

"There is no legal basis to force the government to contribute. We want to do this as a gesture of goodwill and as much credibility as possible."

PCGG appeal

But even as the lawyers work on distributing the loot, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's Good Government Chair Carlos Dominga said he had given PCGG lawyer Alcuin Papa an appeal the case to the US Supreme Court.

The case involves a dispute over a \$35 million brokerage fee paid to a New York-based Merrill Lynch merchant