

LEGISLATION ON WOMEN'S ISSUES IN THE PHILIPPINES: STATUS, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

by
SOCORRO L. REYES*

I. Introduction

The Congress of the Philippines has completed two regular sessions from the time of its election in May 1987 and is scheduled to reconvene on the fourth Monday of July 1989 for its third regular session. It is time to assess what it has done to address the needs and concerns of women who constitute more than half of the voting population. This paper will describe and analyze the bills and resolutions introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate in both quantitative and qualitative terms and in their procedural and substantive aspects. It is the objective of this paper not only to provide information about the status of legislation on women's issues in the Philippines but also to suggest possible courses of action that can be taken by women's groups in pushing for a feminist legislative agenda.

II. Status of Legislation on Women

In the House of Representatives, 51 bills and six resolutions on matters affecting women were introduced in the last two years while in the Senate, there were 46 bills and 11 resolutions. They covered a wide range of subjects like child care, domestic helpers, mail order brides, maternity leave, sexual harassment, discrimination in the workplace, hospitality workers, overseas Filipinas, women's reproductive health, sex exploitation, family relations, and protection of minors and children.

*Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, De La Salle University, Taft Avenue, Manila

Child Care

The legislation proposed on child care focus on *barangay* (village) day care centers as they are called in the House and women's community support centers as they are termed in the Senate. Two issues on child care emerge: funding and the allowance of day care workers. Some have proposed the nationalization of the centers so that they are assured of a share in the national budget while others have suggested that they can be supported from the earnings of the PAGCOR*, the government corporation that operates casinos. The proposed monthly allowance for day care center workers has ranged from P500 (about \$25) to P1,000 (about \$50). It is interesting to note that there is only one bill that proposes a workplace-based child care center by providing incentives to the industrial establishments and factories that include tax credits and exemptions. The scant attention given to the issue of child care is attributed by some studies to the extended family system in the Philippines and the availability of domestic helpers. It is not uncommon to find grandmothers and aunts taking care of the young children of a working couple. Though domestic helpers are getting more scarce, the few lucky ones who have enough financial resources still manage to find a full-time, stay-in *yaya* or baby sitter.

Domestic Helpers

It is often noted that the emancipation of the middle class women in the Philippines is at the expense of other women – the domestic helpers who take over housekeeping jobs like cleaning, washing, ironing, cooking, taking care of the children and other miscellaneous tasks. Not a few legislators (mostly male) have taken a keen interest in the welfare of these helpers by proposing compulsory social security coverage and increasing their compensation. The suggestions range from P250-700 in Metro Manila; P200-500 in chartered cities and first class municipalities; and P100-300 in other municipalities. This minimum compensation is in addition to free board and lodging, hospitalization and other fringe benefits plus exemption from payment of income taxes.

*Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation.

Mail Order Brides

The business of providing Filipino wives to foreigners for a lucrative price has brought fortunes to so-called friendship or match-making clubs and tragedy to countless women who were attracted to prospects of living in a foreign country and saving dollars for their needy families. The horror stories about their plight have triggered legislative proposals in the Lower House like the requirement for male foreigners marrying Filipinas to submit a certificate of good moral character and proof of gainful trade, business or employment. The Senate has gone a little farther by completely outlawing the mail order business and prohibiting the publication or broadcast of any advertisement that recruits or sells Filipino women as wives to foreigners.

Maternity Leave

Another issue area on women's welfare that has generated interest is maternity leave, particularly, the number of days covered and the requirements for coverage. Under existing law, working women are entitled only to 45 days of maternity leave and only for four childbirths. They also have to comply with certain periods of employment to avail of the privilege and benefits of maternity leave. The new legislative proposals not only increase the number of days of paid maternity leave to anywhere between 60-120 days but also scraps the required period of employment and the number of child births covered. There is also a bill that will include normal obstetrical delivery in the Philippine medicare plan that used to cover only deliveries by Caesarean section.

Sexual Harassment

Two bills in the House and one in the Senate prescribe penalties for sexual harassment defined as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct with sexual undertones submission to which is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition for the employment or promotion of an employee or for the non-imposition of disciplinary action upon the latter." (Senate Bill No. 256). Both the House and Senate legislative proposals make the employers liable for the action of their managers and other supervisory

officials who use their position to molest or exploit female applicants or employees. The Senate Bill penalizes violators by imprisonment of not less than one month nor more than six months and a fine of not less than P1,000 nor more than P10,000 or both such fine and imprisonment.

Discrimination in the Workplace

In both the House and the Senate, identical bills were filed to strengthen the prohibition on discrimination against women with respect to terms and conditions of employment. Considered acts of discrimination are: "1) payment of a lesser wage, salary or other forms of remuneration, to a female employee as against a male employee, for work of equal value; and 2) favoring a male employee over a female employee with respect to admission to employment and simply on account of their sexes." Sex-based work discrimination is made both a criminal and civil liability punishable under the pertinent provisions of the Labor Code. To further assure that the law is complied with, there is a proposal in both houses creating the Commission on Equal Opportunity for Women.

Hospitality Workers

Another area that has generated serious concern among legislators is the plight of hospitality workers that now constitute a huge segment of the female work force. Like discrimination in the workplace, identical bills were filed in both houses that seek to protect women in the hospitality industry by providing them with social security and insurance coverage, salaries that conform to the minimum wage law, and termination or separation pay equivalent to one month's salary for every year of service. It also requires employers to issue a written contract of employment detailing the working hours, working conditions, rest days, job description, and duration of the contract.

Some sectors criticize this proposal as an encouragement of the hospitality industry but Senator Santanina Rasul, the principal sponsor in the Senate explains: "This bill should serve as a deterrent to the sprouting of night clubs, sauna baths and similar establishments which

thrive by taking advantage of their workers in terms of low pay and deplorable working conditions, among others."

Overseas Filipina Workers

Two resolutions in the House and one in the Senate have directed the concerned committees to conduct inquiries in aid of legislation into the plight of Filipina migrant workers. House Resolution 34 directed the Committee on Labor to conduct an inquiry into reports that Filipino domestics abroad continue to be subjected not only to illegal practices as contract substitution and wage discrimination but also maltreatment, sexual harassment, and rape. Another resolution specifically addresses the plight of Filipina migrant workers to Japan.

In the Senate, a resolution directed the Committee on Women and Family Relations to investigate the case of Jocelyn Guanezo who left for Japan in 1985 to work as a night club dancer and returned to Manila appearing battered and heavily drugged.

Women's Reproductive Health

As far as women's reproductive health is concerned, Philippine legislators work within the framework of natural birth control and the constitutional principle of the "right to life from the moment of conception." In the House of Representatives, a resolution was filed directing the Committee on Family Relations and Population to conduct an inquiry in aid of legislation into the reported proliferation of family planning advertisements and to look into the program of the Population Commission which promotes the use of contraceptives and its insistence upon small family size. The House resolution argues that this is against the constitutional mandate protecting the right of couples to establish a family in accordance with their religious conviction. It further claims that the use of foreign loans and assistance in the implementation of the program leads to foreign interference in the formulation of national population policies.

The Senate feels pretty much the same as far as the use of artificial contraceptives is concerned, going as far as identifying the artificial

methods to be banned (intra-uterine device and the injectible drug depo-provera) and suggesting the use of the Billings Ovulation method, a natural technique that is "universally applicable and acceptable as a means of achieving or avoiding pregnancy and raising a family in accordance with religious convictions."

To express their solidarity and concern over the reproductive health of women, both houses of Congress have passed a resolution declaring 1988-1997 the decade for "safe motherhood."

Sex Exploitation

Proposed legislation on sex exploitation focuses on prohibiting the sale, distribution and exhibition of obscene and pornographic materials and showing of indecent shows in movie, television, video cassette, and stage. Pornography is considered a form of exploitation and a crime principally against woman because it degrades, humiliates and violates their dignity and human rights. The three bills in the House and one in the Senate increase the penalties for violations providing for both imprisonment in their medium and maximum periods and fines ranging from P50,000 to P100,000.

Family Relations

The subject that has attracted the most number of bills in the area of women's concerns is family relations, particularly in terms of amending certain provisions of the Family Code or Executive Order 209. For purposes of this paper, the bills will be divided into those that concern solemnization, validity, dissolution/annulment of marriage; and those that pertain to property relations.

Among the bills proposed in the area of women's issues, the only one that has been approved on third reading in the House of Representatives is that which restores the power to solemnize marriages to provincial governors and to city and municipal mayors. However, there are several interesting legislative proposals that aim to promote equality in the marital relationship and protect married women from domestic

violence. In the Philippines, adultery is a crime committed by "any married woman who shall have sexual intercourse with a man not her husband and by the man who has carnal knowledge of her even if the marriage is subsequently declared void." Clearly this definition in the Revised Penal Code is biased against women and it was thus proposed in one bill filed in the lower house that the term *married woman* be changed to *spouse* and the word *man* to *person* so that it is applicable to both husband and wife. Another bill that seeks to introduce equality in the marriage is a Senate proposal that amends Article 46 of the Family Code to include as a ground for annulment of a marriage not only the wife's concealment of the fact that she was pregnant by a man other than her husband during the time of marriage but also the husband's concealment of the fact that at the time of the marriage, he has sired children by another woman or impregnated another woman.

The Senate has been very active in the introduction of bills that will protect women against domestic violence. One proposal provides heavier penalties for habitual wife-beating defined as "infliction of physical injuries by the husband upon the wife for at least two successive times in a period of one year, regardless of whether or not the spouses are living together." Another bill even exempts a woman suffering from battered wife syndrome from criminal liability in case she shall kill her husband while being subjected to physical violence. An interesting measure presented in the Senate punishes marital rape committed by a husband against his wife under the following circumstances: 1) when she resists his advances because he is afflicted with AIDS or any other sexually transmittable disease; 2) when the man has in fact abandoned the wife without justification for at least one year; 3) when the man has been charged with bigamy or concubinage; and 4) when the man attempts carnal knowledge under scandalous circumstances.

There are several attempts in Congress to expand the coverage or scope of the dissolution or annulment of marriages. In the House of Representatives, a bill provides that whenever a marriage, duly and legally solemnized by a priest, minister, imam, rabbi or presiding officer of an established church or religion in the Philippines is subsequently annulled or dissolved in a final judgment of decree by said church or religion in accordance with the canons or precepts of the latter, the said

annulment shall be recognized and given full force and effect in the Philippines. In the Senate, a measure was introduced amending Article 26 of the Family Code to enable the Filipino spouse of a foreigner to remarry under Philippine laws if the alien husband or wife has secured a divorce abroad. The same is sought by another bill for the Filipino spouse of a Filipino citizen who, after the marriage has become a naturalized foreign citizen and has validly obtained divorce.

But absolute divorce in the Philippines remains a remote possibility although in the House of Representatives a daring male legislator has proposed absolute divorce when "the marriage has irretrievably broken down" which can occur under any of the following circumstances: 1) adultery on the part of the wife; concubinage on the part of the husband; 2) an attempt of either spouse on the life of the other; and 3) incompatibility.

Another important development in the annulment of marriages is the proposal that affliction by any of the parties at the time of marriage with a sexually transmittable disease found to be serious and incurable can be a ground for annulment.

All these efforts to provide a way out of marriage faces a major constraint not only in the conservative Filipino culture but also in the constitutional principle that recognizes the family as the basic unit of society. In fact in the two houses of Congress, there is a pending bill that provides for the creation of a Commission on the Family which shall recommend to Congress and to the President policies and programs to strengthen the solidarity of the Filipino family and promote its total development.

Another ticklish issue in the relations between husband and wife has to do with property. In the House of Representatives, there is a proposal to amend Article 96 of the new Family Code by providing that in case of disagreement over the administration and enjoyment of the conjugal property of the spouses, either party shall go to court for proper pending resolution of the case. Under the Family Code, if such conflicts develop, the decision of the husband prevails. Further strengthening the married woman's position over property matters is a bill which grants the wife

the authority to ask for the annulment of any contract entered into by the husband without her consent, when such consent is required or any act or contract of the husband which tends to defraud or impair her interest in the conjugal partnership property even after the dissolution of marriage.

There seems to be an agreement between the House and the Senate proposals that future spouses may, in marriage settlements, agree upon the regime of absolute community, conjugal partnership of gains, complete separation of property, or any other arrangement but that in the absence of such marriage settlement or when the regime agreed upon is void, the system of conjugal partnership of gains, not absolute community of property will prevail.

Protection of Children and Minors

Legislative intervention in the protection of children and minors begin with their concern with the right to life from the moment of conception embodied usually in resolutions directing an inquiry, in aid of legislation, to determine "observance and respect of the right to life of the conceived child and to define the necessary means to operationalize fully the constitutional provision that mandates protection of the life of the unborn considering the widespread availability and promotion of abortifacient drugs and devices and, in specific regard, to establish whether birth control programs are aligned and consistent with the present constitutional pro-life precept." (Senate Resolution No. 450). In another bill filed in the Senate, mothers who take cocaine or other illegal drugs during pregnancy are penalized since this can cause death and serious physical injury to the unborn or newborn child. A related development is the introduction of a measure that prohibits surrogate motherhood including the selling of infants. Another bill proposes to establish in every barangay a center committed to the total development and protection of children between the ages of one to four.

Two other areas of concern as far as children are concerned are sexual exploitation and adoption. In the Senate, four bills and one resolution were filed that provide for stronger deterrence against pros-

titution and sexual exploitation of minors defining the acts constituting such offenses and providing legal penalties for their commission. In the case of adoption, the Senate passed a resolution to look into the proliferation of adoption cases being filed by foreign nationals adopting Filipino children reportedly at an average of five cases a day. A bill was also filed amending Article 184 of Title VII of the Family Code to prohibit adoption by any of the following: 1) previous guardian; 2) person convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude; and 3) an alien except a former Filipino citizen who seeks to adopt a relative by consanguinity or the legitimate child of his or her Filipino spouse. In another legislative measure, it is provided that the adopted child acquires the reciprocal rights and obligations arising from parent-child relationship but that the adopter shall have the discretion or right to determine whether or not to give an inheritance to the adopted child as a legal heir.

The problems of child trafficking is also addressed by a bill which declares that the Act prohibiting this practice is violated when one makes arrangements for the foreign travel of a child without first securing the written authority under oath of the child's parents and without securing the necessary clearance from the Department of Social Work and Services. The prescribed penalty is a fine of not less than P20,000 nor more than P30,000, or imprisonment of not less than 12 nor more than 20 years.

What every parent should know, however, is the existence of a legislative proposal that expands the criminal liability of parents to include: 1) concealing or abandoning a child with the intent to make such child lose his civil status; 2) causing abetting, or permitting the truancy of the child from school where he is enrolled; 3) inflicting cruel and unusual punishment upon the child or deliberately subjecting him to indignities and other excessive chastisement that embarrass or humiliate him; and 4) allowing or requiring the child to drive without a license or with a license which the parent knows to have been illegally procured.

The most comprehensive legislation proposed to protect children is an Act which implements the constitutional provision on the "right of children to special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty,

exploitation and other conditions prejudicial to their development, including protection from prostitution, rape, sodomy and other forms of child abuse."

III. Problems

This quick survey of bills and resolutions on women's issues filed in both houses of Congress will easily impress readers of this paper with the gigantic strides that feminism has achieved in the Philippines but a careful, second look will reveal otherwise. In the first place, there is the procedural problem involved in the enactment of these bills into law. After two years, Congress has enacted into law only one legislative measure on women's issues namely Republic Act No. 6725, amending discrimination against women with respect to terms and conditions of employment. A bill which has been approved in the House during the third reading and which is now in the Senate Committee on Women and Family Relations and the Committee on Local Government is the measure which restores the power to solemnize marriages to provincial governors and city and municipal mayors.

In the House of Representatives, most of the bills have not even been discussed in the committees. The bill providing Social Security System (SSS) coverage for domestic helpers and the measure declaring the fundamental equality of women and men were the only ones reported out of the committee. Up for second reading are the legislative proposals increasing the compensation of domestic helpers, the legalization of church annulment of marriage and dissolution of other marriages, and the imposition of additional requirements on foreign male citizens desiring to marry Filipinas.

The Senate committees work faster as indicated by the following bills which have already been reported out: 1) the social costs of artificial contraceptives; 2) the regulation of employment of hospitality workers; 3) the proclamation of 1987- 1997 as the Decade of Safe Motherhood; 4) the privileges and benefits of solo parents; 5) the adoption of Filipino children by foreigners; 6) the creation of the Family Commission; 7) the conjugal partnership of gains; 8) annulment of marriage due to concealment of pregnancy; 9) the strengthening of the population policy

of government; 10) the removal of limitation on the number of childbirths for maternity leave; 11) habitual wife beating; 12) declaring unlawful the mail order bride business; 13) sexual exploitation of minors; 14) the prohibition of pornography; 15) the expansion of the criminal liability of parents; 16) the corruption of minors; and 17) the undue commercial exploitation of minors. Approved on third reading is the bill improving the compensation of domestic helpers. The bills amending certain provisions of the Family Code are supposed to be reported out soon.

The problem lies not only in the poor attendance of legislators in their respective committees but also in the proliferation of bills on one particular topic like the wages for domestic helpers or the number of days of paid maternity leave. The committee thus spends a great deal of time consolidating these bills instead of getting on with the business of conducting hearings and reporting them out. This is true for example with the six bills on child care filed in the House.

Much of the problem can be solved if legislators will discover the virtue of asking their colleagues to co-sponsor bills and building majority coalitions in support of their respective legislative proposals. There is also very little awareness of the need to introduce simultaneously counterpart bills in the other chamber. The only bills that moved together in both houses because of the filing of counterpart bills were the proposed measures prohibiting discrimination in the workplace, the protection of hospitality workers, the creation of the Commission on Equal Opportunity for Women and the Commission on the Family, the declaration of the Decade of Safe Motherhood, the banning of pornography and the institution of the conjugal partnership of gains. All the rest proceed on a singular sponsorship basis thus prolonging the legislative process since the rules require that the other house consider the bill following the same procedures in the originating chamber.

The other problem compounding the whole situation is the referral of one bill to several committees. For example, the Senate Bill on the battered wife syndrome was referred to the Committee on Constitutional Amendments, Revision of Codes and Laws and the Committee on Women and Family Relations. This means dealing with the sentiments

of two groups which usually cause serious delays due to endless questioning and debates on top of perennial absenteeism. There also seems to be little awareness among Members that "Congress in committee is Congress at work while Congress in session is Congress in public exhibition."

On the substantive side, the bills on women's concerns have a very high welfare content but low feminist element. It must be recognized however that the legislative proposals truly seek the protection and promotion of the interests of women. Who can question the gains for women if there are adequate and accessible child care centers, better compensation for domestic helpers, extended paid maternity leave, equality in the workplace and prohibition of sexual harassment? And women will welcome moves to protect overseas Filipina migrant workers, regulate the hospitality industry and ban the mail order bride business. Married women will also appreciate the protection afforded to them by bills that address the problem of domestic violence and marital rape and the expansion of the scope and coverage of annulment and dissolution of marriage. It is also heartening to note that wives will now have equal rights with their husbands over the acquisition and disposition of property. If only half of these will materialize, the Filipino woman will be one of the luckiest of the female species.

But feminism means more than just a reform of structures in society and modification of existing laws which discriminate against women. It means that it is for women to say what women are like, what women want, what women enjoy, what women can do. Why then can women not have the right over their own bodies and have access to all forms of contraception or birth control? In this regard, not even the progressive Senate has manifested any desire to respect the woman's freedom of choice. The House of Representatives which is the more conservative chamber has been true to form even questioning the programs of the Population Commission which encourage family planning and the reduction of the size of families. There are those who believe that the so-called pro-life argument is actually just a pro-birth crusade since it fails to consider the socio-economic situation in the country these children are born to, which usually lead to the eventual death of millions of malnourished infants, most of whom cannot even reach their first birthday.

Another important observation that must be noted is that male legislators have introduced more measures to upgrade the status and promote the interests of women than their female counterparts, except on such areas as prohibition of discrimination in the workplace and the regulation of the hospitality industry. In fact, in the House of Representatives, male legislators introduced the legislative proposals on the mail order brides, the overseas Filipina workers and dissolution and annulment of marriages. In both chambers, the men took the initiative in proposing bills on sexual harassment, women's reproductive health, and equal rights of women and men. More male legislators came up with bills on child care, domestic helpers, maternity leave, pornography, and domestic violence.

It is equally significant to note the number of bills introduced to amend the Family Code (Executive Order No. 209) which was signed on July 6, 1987 and amended on July 17, 1987 (Executive Order No. 227). The amendments focus on 1) the dissolution of marriages between Filipino citizens and foreigners; 2) who can solemnize marriages and where; 3) marriages among members of ethnic cultural communities; 4) subsistence and termination of previous marriages; 5) annulment; 6) property relations; 7) adoption of children. Based on the legislative proposals to change these aspects of the Family Code, one can seriously question the progressive and pro-women character of this Executive Order which is always cited as a proof of how fortunate women are in the present political regime.

IV. Toward A Women's Action Agenda: Public Policy Advocacy

After making a critique of current legislation on women's issues and spotting flaws and weaknesses, the next logical step is to determine if there are available remedies to address the problems raised namely, proliferation of bills, slow legislative action, and lack of a feminist perspective. One possible move that women's groups can take is approach legislators sympathetic to women's issues and broach the idea of a Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues. The membership of this Caucus does not necessarily have to be confined to female Members of the House and the Senate as the painful reality is that there can be female male chauvinists like there can be male feminists. Based on the

authorship of current resolutions and bills filed in Congress favorable to women, it is possible to identify the prospective members of this caucus. This group will be a bipartisan organization that will not only consolidate and promote legislation to address women's issues and problems but also maintain a steady commitment to sharing with fellow members of Congress information on the concerns of women and increasing their colleague's sensitivity to these.

Women's groups can act as support structures for the Caucus by providing fact sheets and briefing papers on women's issues that are currently the subject of legislation. They can also take the initiative in consolidating the legislative agenda for women in an omnibus legislative package. The countless bills and resolutions filed in Congress that have direct impact on the welfare of women can be divided into three major categories: family, work and health, and can be titled "Protection of Filipino Women Act for 1989". Bills that can be included under the family portion are: Amendments to the Family Code; the creation of a Family Commission and Family Courts; child care; maternity benefits; and mail order brides. The bills on overseas and local women workers can fall under the general heading of women and work while legislative proposals on family planning and population control, AIDS prevention, primary health care, etc. fit in the category of health.

A consolidated omnibus bill has several advantages. First, it gives a clear sense of unity, purpose and direction in legislative proposals designed to push the women's legislative agenda. Second, it makes women's groups concentrate on particular policy areas rather than diffuse their efforts and divide their attention among a vast number of bills and resolutions. Third, there is greater continuity in the advocacy work because bills not passed in the previous Congress can be picked up and pursued in the next regular session. Lastly, there will be a more functional and symbiotic relationship with Congress which will have a reliable supply for legislative measures from collaborating women's groups and the latter will have an easier access to Members who can introduce their proposals.

Other direct tactics of public policy advocacy that women's groups can use are letter writing and publication of a newsletter. Letter writing

as a tactic will be effective if the group has a national membership distributed in the different Congressional districts all over the country. It is thus important for women's groups to seriously consider expanding their base of recruitment. It will be prudent to organize local chapters and keep a file of members by region and district. The bottomline in politics are electoral votes, and any legislator who is interested in another term will have to respond to an avalanche of mail from his constituents demanding that he take a specific position upholding their interests in crucial policy issues.

The newsletter is a very powerful medium for informing the members about the status of the group's legislative advocacy and what they can do to help push particular measures especially when these are moving very slowly. The members can be given an update on the bills introduced and pending in Congress that aim to upgrade the conditions of women.

Lastly, as part of the action agenda, women's groups can conduct feminist, consciousness-raising seminars to both male and female legislators. The research shows that there are women legislators who are not legislators for women. And the framework used is legislating for women's concerns is hardly feminist, although clearly much can be gained from the enactment of these welfare measures into laws. There is an obvious attempt to win the women's vote which constitutes more than half of the electorate. But there is a need to inject the feminist perspective in the formulation of laws not for political purposes but for the transformation of oppressive patriarchal structures.

Women's issues in the Philippines cannot be separated from the broader socio-economic and political issues that affect both the male and female sectors of society. In fact, it can be argued that women's concerns like the mail order brides, hospitality girls, overseas migrant workers and child prostitution and trafficking are very much tied up with the sorry state of the economy indicated by the soaring unemployment, huge national debt and rising cost of living as well as the poor and inefficient delivery of social services. This is what makes Third World feminism different from First World feminism because in countries like the Philippines a feminist is not only a gender activist but also

a social reformist. She is in a double bind: as a citizen of a poor, underdeveloped, heavily indebted, graft-hidden country and as a subject of a patriarchal, male-dominated culture.

The historical experience of many societies which overthrew the existing socio-economic and political order and adopted a new ideological and social system show that political liberation has not brought about gender emancipation. In other words, women's issues are not and cannot be addressed separately from the greater national concerns but neither can they be subsumed by them. The women's agenda should be dealt with simultaneously with the broader problems of society because the issues raised are deeply rooted in the traditional patriarchal system that continues to prevail even in the most prosperous and advanced countries.

