Thailand’s National Legislative Assembly Approves
Prevention and Remedial Measures for Adolescent Pregnancy Bill

On February 4, 2016, the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) approved a bill to address the teen pregnancy problem prevalent in Thailand. The Prevention and Remedial Measures for Adolescent Pregnancy Bill (“Adolescent Pregnancy” Bill), consisting of 23 sections, stipulates that young people aged 10 to 19 must be given access to reproductive health information and services. Schools must offer comprehensive sexuality education, provide consultations on pregnancy prevention and allow teenage mothers to continue their studies at school until graduation. The Adolescent Pregnancy Bill also imposes a maximum jail term of one month and/or a fine of 10,000 Baht for anyone refusing to assist endangered teenagers.

AFPPD reached out to Hon. Dr. Jetn Sirathranont, Chairperson of the NLA’s Public Health Committee and AFPPD’s Secretary General for a brief interview on this recently approved bill. Hon. Dr. Jetn who proposed this bill acknowledged that the new bill would be beneficial for young girls who become pregnant as it assures access to reproductive health services and assistance to young mothers. Through its information provisions, it will also help to prevent further unwanted pregnancies.

**PLEASE EXPLAIN ABOUT THE BACKDROP OF THE NEWLY APPROVED LAW?**

Teenage pregnancy has been a growing problem in Thailand over the past decade. More than 50 out of every 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19 give birth at a young age each year. A report from the Department of Health states that 80 per cent of teenage mothers say that their pregnancy was unintended, and nearly one third resorts to abortion. Another 10 per cent deliver babies but then abandon them at hospitals.

The recently approved bill aims to alleviate this problem by ensuring that young people have access to reproductive health information and services. Additionally, in the event a young girl does become pregnant, she will be able to continue her studies while receiving support and assistance for the birth.

**PLEASE ELABORATE ON AFPPD’s WORK IN SUPPORT OF THE BILL?**

In close cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Thailand Country Office, AFPPD has supported a project to inform Thailand’s Members of Parliament of reproductive health policy issues, such as high teenage pregnancy rates, since 2014. AFPPD has engaged parliamentarians in identifying evidence-based and good-practice policy solutions.
In August 2015, AFPPD organized a consultation to discuss the issue of teenage pregnancy in collaboration with the Committee on Public Health of the National Legislative Assembly and UNFPA Thailand, reviewing the draft Adolescent Pregnancy Bill. The consultation aimed to strengthen political commitment to improve the proposed bill. A total of 50 participants attended the consultation including two NLA Standing Committee Chairs, the Director of Bureau of Reproductive Health, the Ministry of Public Health, a UNFPA Thailand Representative, AFPPD Executive Director, and speakers from civil society organizations and youth groups. The consultation provided a collaborative opportunity for different stakeholders to share their views on the issue and to provide comments on the proposed bill.

**WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FORESEE, IF ANY, DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION STAGE?**

The Adolescent Pregnancy Bill provides measures designed to alleviate the teenage pregnancy problem as it provides clear action plans, budgets and inter-agency cooperation. I don’t foresee any difficulty as relevant ministries have already started to implement many items outlined in the approved bill following their strategic action plans. However, I think that the Ministry of Education may have a huge task to ensure that age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education is being taught in all schools throughout the entire country.

Under this bill, a special committee will also be appointed to propose policies to prevent and reduce pregnancies among teenagers and to map out penalties for those refusing to abide by the committee’s order. The committee will also be tasked with modernizing gender and sexuality studies.

**WILL THE GOVERNMENT UNDERTAKE A PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ABOUT THE APPROVED BILL?**

After the law is enacted, relevant ministries should be responsible for implementing awareness raising campaigns. Representatives from relevant ministries who were part of the drafting committee promised that they would speed up the work process within their ministries. I think the law will be an important tool for changing societal attitude towards this issue. It will facilitate wider public understanding and awareness. The feedback on the newly approved law has been positive overall so far, particularly by the media. Lastly, I would also like to add that there should be a law on reproductive health and women’s rights in the future so that all target groups in Thailand will be covered and their sexual and reproductive rights will be protected.

* The NLA approved the bill with 179 votes in favor and six abstentions. The new law will come into effect 120 days after its announcement in the Royal Gazette.

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