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Save the Children Philippines calls for effective implementation of First 1,000 Days law to reduce deaths of children from preventable diseases

Save the Children Philippines called for effective implementation of Republic Act 11148 or Kalusugan at Nutrisyon ng Mag-Nanay Act (or First 1,000 Days Law) to address the rising cases of stunting and malnutrition among children below five years old, reaching 7 million across the country, mostly in conflict affected areas in Mindanao.

Lawyer Alberto Muyot, Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children Philippines welcomed the signing of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Republic Act 11148 last May 2 by the Department of Health Secretary Francisco Duque during the First 1,000 Days Forum which ensures strategic nutrition and health services to pregnant mothers and children below two years old living in deprived and marginalized situations.

“The passage of the law is a landmark move to ensure that no child dies from preventable causes before reaching five years old,” said Muyot. “Save the Children stands ready Save the Children Philippines stands ready to work with the government and civil society in the effective implementation of the IRR of the First 1,000 Days Law to ensure all Filipino children will have a healthy start in life.”

Prior to passage of the law, Save the Children Philippines has been implementing Project Nurture (Nutrition among Urban Poor through Unified Response) that provides health and nutrition assistance to poor households with nutritionally at risk pregnant women and children with moderate and acute malnutrition in eight selected barangay of Navotas City.

In line with Save the Children’s global campaign on Stop the War on Children, he raised the need to address chronic malnutrition of children affected by armed conflict in Mindanao. The National Nutrition Survey in 2015 indicates that 45.2 per cent or close to half of the number of children in conflict affected areas in Mindanao suffer from chronic malnutrition. The campaign calls on stakeholders-government and rebel forces to adhere to international humanitarian law to allow children to access food and health services, continue classes and safety from hostilities.

Of the 7 million undernourished children in the Philippines, the survey indicates that 3.7 million or 33.4 per cent were stunted. The Philippines remains 9th in the ten countries with the highest number of stunted children in the world along with famine- and war-stricken countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

“Lost childhoods are increasingly concentrated among children who suffer from poverty and those affected by conflict,” said Muyot.

The first 1,000 days of life that starts from the child's conception in the mother's womb up to two years old is a critical window of opportunity to deliver optimal care for pregnant mothers and children," said Muyot.

He said failure to attend to the health and nutrition needs within the first 1,000 days of the child contributes to the risk of the child's death before reaching five years old. Brain development is very crucial during this period as damage due to sub-optimal care and poor nutrition is deemed irreversible or permanent.

"The IRR explicitly mentioned that good health, proper nutrition, early learning, safety and security, and responsive caregiving as key components in implementing the law to deliver a holistic approach during the first 1,000 days through multi-sectoral participation and convergence," said Dr. Amado Parawan, Health and Nutrition Advisor of Save the Children Philippines.

Save the Children Philippines is closely monitoring the situation of displaced children from five conflict affected Mindanao provinces which reached 76,383 in March. The group continues to provide Temporary Learning Spaces and Child Friendly Spaces and other learning materials to displaced children in Mindanao as part of their psychosocial recovery.

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