

Philippines fails to reduce maternal mortality over 10 years - DOH

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MANILA, Philippines - Over the last decade, the rate of maternal mortality in the Philippines has failed to improve, Health Secretary Enrique Ona bared on Monday.

From 2006 to 2010, there were 221 deaths for every 100,000 live births recorded. The rate is higher than the 162 deaths per 100,000 live births from 2000 to 2005, but statistically rounds out to the same maternal mortality ratio, Ona said. Whatever the case, it is clearly not an improvement.

"This is a challenge for us," the health secretary said. "Despite efforts, our interventions to lower maternal deaths have no progress because the numbers haven't changed," Ona told reporters.

The DOH has been working to lower the maternal mortality rate to 54 per 100,000 live births.

For the past two years the DOH has upgraded hospital birthing facilities and added birthing centers, Ona noted.

But maternal and child health advocates also tie to maternal mortality to broader concerns and discussions revolving around reproductive health. Such concerns involve lobbies for sex education, and greater access to affordable and subsidized artificial contraceptive products and services - advocacies that face stiff opposition from religious leaders, particularly the still dominant Catholic hierarchy in the Philippines.

The latest figures on maternal mortality will likely provide more fodder for the RH lobby.

Last April [the United Nations Population Fund \(UNFPA\) said teenage pregnancy in the Philippines surged by 70 percent, also over the first decade of this century.](#) UNFPA officials called for greater education efforts on reproductive health matters in the country.

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