

Philippine birth rate falls slowly

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Agence France-Presse

The Philippines population is expected to reach 88.1 million people by the end of 2007, with the government attempting to bring down the birth rate and alleviate poverty, officials said Tuesday.

Officials in the largely impoverished country said people were having more children than they could afford to support.

The official Commission on Population said the population would rise with 1.7 million births by the end of 2007, a growth rate of 1.95 percent.

"The population growth rate is going down very, very slowly," commission deputy executive director Mia Ventura, told AFP.

Many Filipino couples have an average of four children and the government is trying to bring this down to three children per couple, she added.

The government expects to bring the annual population growth rate down to 1.90 percent by 2010, Ventura said, and the projected figures compared with 2.36 percent posted in 2000.

Last November, former president Fidel Ramos warned the government's "unwarranted subservience" to the church on population growth would result in the Philippines facing a major crisis in five years.

Efforts to bring down the population growth rate have been hampered by the dominant Roman Catholic church which has campaigned against government efforts to spread the use of contraceptives.

The church is opposed to all forms of artificial birth control.