
PHILIPPINES
THE FAMILY AND THE COMMUNITY:
BEST APPROACHES FOR AUTISM

Speech of **ATTY. JOSE MIGUEL T. ARROYO**
Spouse of the President of the Republic of the Philippines
Honorary Co-Chair, Second Annual UN World Focus on Autism
22 September 2009, Grand Hyatt New York Hotel, New York

Good afternoon.

In the Philippines, developmental disorders became the fourth most prominent pediatric case from 2000-2008. Under this category, autism figured prominently as one of the top three morbidities after mental retardation and cerebral palsy.

It is heartbreaking to note that awareness about autism is still low and the even among families of children with ASD is the lack of knowledge and expertise to handle autism, complicated by a shortage of experts and trained professionals on autism spectrum.

We have taken small but remarkable steps in addressing the growing problem of autism.

We have the **Center for Autism and Related Disorders, Phils, or CARD**, which was established in 1995 to run a therapy center that has grown into a “one-stop-shop” on autism management. CARD now runs a bakery, called “All Dough”, that provides training and employment to persons with ASD. With this bakery project, persons with ASD are empowered to become better and more productive members of the society.

Recently, a city in Metro Manila, enacted the precedent-setting Ordinance for Special Children on April 2, 2009, in observance of the 2nd World Autism Awareness Day. This ordinance establishes **Special Coordinating Day Care Centers** in strategic places in every district of the city with special education teachers **to handle ASD children of indigent families**. We hope to replicate this in all local government units in the Philippines through a Presidential Executive Order.

Legislative mandates have provided the structure for early detection, surveillance and intervention among the marginalized sectors of our society. The **Magna Carta for the Disabled**, a law enacted in 1992 which provides for the rehabilitation, self-development and self-reliance of persons with disability and their integration into the mainstream society as useful and productive individuals.

We also have the first and so far only one of its kind in Asia – the **Early Childhood Care and Development Act** – enacted in the year 2000, which involves a comprehensive, integrative and sustainable program in collaboration with government and service providers, families and the communities, public and private sectors.

However, we cannot overemphasize **the important role of the family**, the basic unit of our society. It is in this basic unit that we build a strong foundation of love and care for the sick, the old and the disabled. Thus, Filipino families reach out to other members of the society and collectively take a huge leap of faith to face the challenge of autism.

So, this early, I would like to invite all of you to the **first-ever International Autism Conference in the Philippines in February 2010**, spearheaded by Autism Hearts Foundation. A state of the art research and development, specialized training center on autism, the **Autism Institute of Asia**, will be launched. This center, we hope will achieve milestones on research for early detection, appropriate interventions.

At the same time, Autism Speaks will launch the **Global Autism Public Health (GAPH) Initiative** in the Philippines to increase autism awareness and better autism management not only in the Philippines but in Asia as well.

On a personal note, I want to make my own contributions. The privately-funded First Gentleman Foundation will donate Php1 Million or US\$20,000 for the holding of the International Autism Conference in the Philippines. The Foundation will also donate PhP10 Million or US\$200,000 to **establish a center within the University of the Philippines-Philippine General Hospital dedicated to the research and development of autism cases, especially among the poor sector of our society**. I hope that in my own little way, we can have our own **GAPH – Good Autism Practices for Healing**.

I thank Autism Speaks for inviting me to this Forum. **You spoke, I listened. And as Autism Speaks, the Philippines as well SPEAKS while Asia and the whole world listens.**

Let us now hear the Philippines speak about autism.

My friends, see you next year at the **International Autism Conference in the Philippines in February 2010**. Thank you and have a good day.