

**PCIJ's e-mail correspondence with Mr. Matt Lussenhop,
Information Officer, U.S. Embassy in Manila
Replies received on 16 August 2006**

1.

PCIJ: Rina Jimenez-David, in a column for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* on August 5, quoted certain statements made by Dr. Elvira Lichauco Henares-Esguerra, a founder of the non-government Children for Breastfeeding Inc., at a public forum celebrating International Breastfeeding Week.

Jimenez-David wrote:

So prepared are the milk companies to protect their turf and expand their market, says the doctor, that they have even compelled officials of the US Embassy (identified as economic counselor Robert Ludan and regional trade representative David Katch) to pressure the Department of Health on the new Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Milk Code.

“When (these Embassy officials) were told that the IRR was formulated upon the initiative of the WHO and Unicef to protect the health and well-being of our infants ... they said in no uncertain terms that there are ways to pressure the WHO, the Unicef and the Philippine government to back off from the IRR... It has become increasingly clear that these two were doing the work of lobbyists and do not speak for the US government because they resort to mere verbal communication ... and chose instead to go straight to the DOH in an attempt to intimidate.”

Is it true, Mr. Lussenhop, as Dr. Esguerra alleges, that American milk companies doing business in the Philippines have “compelled” officials of the US Embassy in Manila to “intimidate” the Department of Health against implementing the revised implementing rules of the Milk Code?

Mr. Matt Lussenhop: These allegations are not accurate, and do not show the true picture of U.S.-Philippines cooperation on health issues. No other foreign country does more than the U.S. to promote healthy mothers and babies in the Philippines.

The U.S. Embassy in Manila maintains excellent cooperation with the Department of Health in a wide array of challenges that face both nations, including avian influenza, bio-security, AIDS and infectious diseases, and more. In addition, U.S. development assistance is helping national and local governments in the Philippines improve maternal and infant health services, providing information and education on AIDS and other infectious diseases, and expanding the quality of health service in remote and poor areas of the country. (For more information: <http://philippines.usaid.gov/ophn.php>)

We regularly share our ideas and views on health issues with our counterparts in the Philippine government, private sector, and non-profit sector, and we welcome their views and opinions.

2.

PCIJ: In my own interview with health secretary Francisco Duque, he confirmed the same information

coming from Dr. Esguerra. Sec. Duque said the US officials spoke with him, the trade secretary, the Executive Secretary, and President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Sec. Duque told me that these officials wanted the health department to stop the implementation of the revised implementing rules, and for government to maintain the existing ones.

An official of the World Health Organization also gave the PCIJ the same information, in a separate interview.

What is the Embassy's reaction to these statements from the health secretary and the WHO?

Mr. Lussenhop: The U.S. believes that infant health is very important and that breast-feeding should be the first choice for infant nutrition. We support the broadest possible availability of information and educational materials regarding infant health.

At the same time, this is an important issue that concerns a number of interested parties including private industry. We encourage the Government of the Philippines to make regulatory decisions and rulings in a transparent manner that incorporate the concerns and views of all interested parties, including private industry, as an important principle in developing sound public policies.