

IAS: POPE'S REMARKS ON CONDOMS DANGEROUS AND IRRESPONSIBLE

20 March 2009 (Geneva, Switzerland) - Pope Benedict XVI 's comments on the role that condoms play in preventing the further spread of HIV are irresponsible and dangerous, says Julio Montaner, President of the International AIDS Society (IAS).

On March 17, 2009, while traveling to Cameroon, the Pope addressed the media, calling AIDS "a tragedy that cannot be overcome by money alone, that cannot be overcome through the distribution of condoms, which can even increase the problem". This is the first time that Pope Benedict has directly spoken out against the use of condoms. While the historic stance of the Roman Catholic Church against contraception use is widely known, Benedict's predecessor John Paul II never spoke out publicly against the use of condoms to prevent HIV infection.

"There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that condoms can increase HIV transmission – absolutely the contrary," said Dr. Montaner. "Male and female condoms, used correctly and consistently, can reduce the risk of sexual transmission of HIV by 80-90 percent."

IAS Executive Director Craig McClure further condemned the Pope's remarks. "This is the first trip to Africa by Pope Benedict, a continent that has been ravaged by AIDS. As of 2006, according to the Vatican, over 17% of the total African population practices Catholicism. The numbers are growing each year. Catholics throughout Africa rely on the spiritual guidance of the Pope. To suggest that condom use contributes to the HIV problem is not merely contrary to scientific evidence and global consensus, it contributes to fueling HIV infection and its consequences - sickness and death. Such outrageous comments are not appropriate coming from the highest office in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church."

Dr. Montaner added, "While condoms are not the only solution to combating HIV, they are a critical, cheap and cost-effective element of a comprehensive approach to HIV prevention. Instead of spreading ignorance, the Pope should use his global position of leadership to encourage young people, who are our future, to protect themselves and others from HIV infection using all the tools we have at our disposal, including condoms. His remarks are insulting to the tireless efforts of committed scientific, public health and human rights leaders around the world to protect the poorest of the poor from HIV infection."

The IAS is the world's leading association of HIV professionals, with more than 13,000 members from 188 countries working at all levels of the global response to HIV/AIDS. IAS members represent scientists, clinicians, public health and community practitioners on the frontlines of the epidemic. The IAS is the lead organizer of the biennial International AIDS Conference and the IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention, which will be held in Cape Town, South Africa in July 2009.

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Inoltre, il Direttore esecutivo del Fondo mondiale della lotta all'Aids, alla tubercolosi e alla malaria, Michel Kazatchkine, ha chiesto «al Papa di ritirare le sue dichiarazioni inaccettabili», perché rappresentano «una negazione della pandemia». «E dire queste cose in un continente come l'Africa dove, sfortunatamente, il 70% delle persone sono affette dall'Aids, è assolutamente incredibile», ha aggiunto. Da Ginevra, l'agenzia delle Nazioni Unite per la lotta all'Aids (Unaid) ha sottolineato come l'uso dei preservativi rappresenti una risposta importante per la strategia di prevenzione contro l'Aids, accanto all'educazione sul virus dell'Hiv, alla fedeltà al partner e ad altre misure.

Per vostra conoscenza

Il Presidente