

## The Pope attacks use of condoms

ACTSA

19.03.2009

In a speech on Tuesday 17 March Pope Benedict XVI claimed that the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa "cannot be overcome by the distribution of condoms. On the contrary, they increase the problem."

The Pope was on his way to Cameroon on his first papal visit to the African continent. He went on to say that a twofold solution is needed of 'humanization of sexuality...which brings with it a new way of behaving' alongside "friendship for those who suffer"

His remarks have sparked an international outcry from AIDS campaigners from around the world.

The head of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Michel Kazatchkine, demanded that the pope retract the statement, saying "these remarks are unacceptable." Speaking to France Inter radio he said: "It's a denial of the epidemic. And to make these remarks on a continent that unfortunately is a continent where 70 percent of the people who have AIDS die, it's absolutely unbelievable,"

A UNAIDS representative said that condoms are an "essential part of combination prevention," adding that with the current infection rate "the world cannot stop the AIDS epidemic without stopping new HIV infections."

In Malawi, Francina Nyirenda, who heads an umbrella group of AIDS programmes, said she hoped more people would ignore the pope's message in a country where the disease has cut life expectancy to 36 years. "Condom use is OK," she said. "Without condoms, Malawi would perish."

In Angola, where the pope is also due to visit this week, activists said Benedict's message should apply only to church doctrine, not public health.

"Condoms are a method of preventing AIDS, not just in Africa but in all the world, and we have to use all forms of prevention that we can against this disease," said Delma Monteiro, who heads a prominent HIV programme.

However, the Pope's representative to Angola, Dom Angelo Becciu supported the Pope's statement saying that it is "...too easy and it's very cheap to say the solution of AIDS is the condom, you don't have the solution there."

About 2.1 percent of Angolans have AIDS, and activists said they would continue to promote condoms as a key part of their prevention strategy.

Pope Benedict arrives in Angola on Friday, for the first papal visit to the country in 17 years.

---