Activists Respond to Pope's Criticism of Condoms

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Activists, doctors, politicians and even officials within the Catholic Church are speaking out against a statement by Pope Benedict XVI, who said during a recent trip to Africa that using condoms in the global fight against AIDS only made the epidemic worse by encouraging sexual behavior, Reuters reports.

"My reaction is that this represents a major step backwards in terms of global health education, is entirely counterproductive and is likely to lead to increases in HIV infection in Africa and elsewhere," said Quentin Sattentau, professor of immunology at Britain's Oxford University. "There is a large body of published evidence demonstrating that condom use reduces the risk of acquiring HIV infection but does not lead to increased sexual activity."

The Vatican defended Benedict's criticism of condoms. Spokesman Father Federico Lombardi affirmed that the pope was "maintaining the position of his predecessors" in advocating abstinence and heterosexual marriage as HIV prevention tools. But others within the Catholic faith are speaking out against the statement.

"Anyone who has AIDS and is sexually active, anyone who seeks multiple partners, must protect others and themselves," said Hans-Jochen Jaschke, a Roman Catholic auxiliary bishop of Hamburg. "So, no taboo on the condom issue, but also no myths and trivialization as if these put the world in order. Condoms can protect, but men often reject them," the bishop added.

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