

# UNAIDS says Pope's condom move makes HIV cooperation easier

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Geneva/Rome, November 23 (ENInews)--The head of UNAIDS, Michel Sidibé, says a statement by Pope Benedict XVI that the use of condoms is justified when intended to reduce "the risk of HIV infection" will make it easier for international organizations to cooperate with faith-based organizations in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Sidibé is the executive director of UNAIDS, the United Nations programme on HIV and AIDS. He was answering a question about the Pope's statement during a 23 November media conference in Geneva.

"The announcement will make cooperation easier with faith-based organizations, in the fight against HIV and AIDS," said the head of UNAIDS. "This is an important step forward." The Roman Catholic Church rejects condoms as a means of birth control and had for many years said they are not a means of preventing AIDS.

In 2009, Pope Benedict had said on a trip to Africa that distributing condoms will "increase the problem" of AIDS.

A book-length interview with Benedict XVI titled, "Light of the World," carried

out with German journalist Peter Seewald was released on 23 November by Ignatius Press and in it the pontiff discusses the issue of condoms.

Benedict says in the interview, "There may be a basis in the case of some individuals, as perhaps when a male prostitute uses a condom, where this can be a first step in the direction of a moralisation, a first assumption of responsibility, on the way toward recovering an awareness that not everything is allowed and that one cannot do whatever one wants.

"But it is not really the way to deal with the evil of HIV infection," says the Pope. "That can really lie only in a humanization of sexuality."

Seewald asks, "Are you saying, then, that the Catholic Church is actually not opposed in principle to the use of condoms?"

Benedict answers, "She of course does not regard it as a real or moral solution, but, in this or that case, there can be nonetheless, in the intention of reducing the risk of infection, a first step in a movement toward a different way, a more human way, of living sexuality."

Sidibé had said in a statement on 22 November, "This move recognizes that responsible sexual behaviour and the use of condoms have important roles in HIV prevention."

He added, "The male latex condom is the single, most efficient, available

technology to reduce the sexual transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections."

UNAIDS said it had worked closely with the Vatican, and Sidibé held "far-reaching discussions" in 2009 with Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski on HIV prevention issues including the prevention of mother-to-child transmission, protecting young people and reducing sexual violence against women and girls.

From Rome, the Associated Press quoted Vatican insiders as saying Pope Benedict had sought to "kick-start a debate" on the role of condoms in the fight against AIDS.

The Rev. Stefan Hippler, a German Catholic priest working on special assignment in South Africa on the issue of HIV for the diocese of Cape Town, told ENInews in Germany, however, that there should not be too much euphoria.

"Let's be more realistic. It is the first step in the right direction but it comes 30 years too late for the AIDS pandemic," he said. "So there can be no celebration but rather encouragement for those ruling our church not to stand still again but to move on and to take modern sciences into account and to be rational in this urgent question threatening so many in Africa."

Lesley-Anne Knight, the secretary general of Caritas Internationalis, the Catholic aid and development organization commented that the Pope's comments in the book "illustrate the importance of compassion and sensitivity in dealing with the complexities of HIV/AIDS prevention. Caritas delivers its HIV/AIDS programmes in line with church

teaching and we will consider ... whether there are implications for our work in these reported comments of Pope Benedict."

The Rome-based La Repubblica editorialised that the Pope "recognises, in certain cases, morality in the use of condoms".

Another Rome newspaper, Il Fatto Quotidiano, hailed the pontiff's words as "a clamorous turning-point for the church".

- Anli Serfontein, ENInews' correspondent in Germany, contributed to this report