

## What's the issue?

In the *real* world - where it is ridiculous to think that people can be made to abstain from sex - condoms are the most effective front-line tool in the battle against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

However - motivated by religious dogma, which they frequently dress up as pseudo-science - the Catholic Church uses its influence to stop the distribution of condoms and to poison the minds of the most at-risk communities against their use.

The deaths, devastation of communities and destruction of families are incalculable as this madness wreaks havoc in sub-Saharan Africa and through South America - indeed everywhere the Church can use its wealth and power to interfere in AIDS prevention work.

- Human Rights Watch (HRW) has noted that the Roman Catholic Church in particular colludes with and bolsters the pseudo-science peddled by the religious right in the United States.
- Religious lobbies urge the cutting of funding by Western governments - particularly the US - if their 'abstinence' programmes aren't prioritised over condom education and distribution.
- Health workers struggle to get their voices heard above the din of disinformation and are hampered by the fact that their funding often comes with religious strings attached.

*Shocked? Read on...*

## Secular Charter

### The creation of a just and equitable secular society in Britain

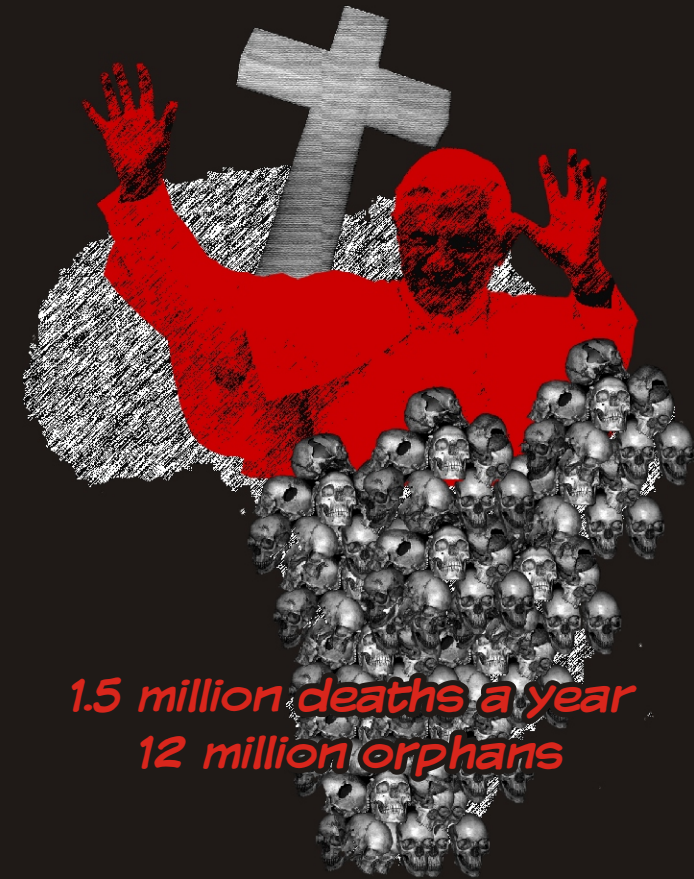
The National Secular Society seeks a society in which religion and the State are distinctly separated, and where human rights always take precedence over religious demands. We would like to see the following ten objectives incorporated into a written, secular constitution:

- There should be no established state religion.
- The state should not fund religious activities.
- The state should not fund religious proselytising in any form and the provision of all services using public money should be religiously neutral.
- The state should not prescribe, proscribe, or amend religious doctrine.
- The state should not interfere in religious hierarchies, nor interfere in issues strictly related to membership.
- No action by the state should have the primary effect of engaging in religious practice.
- No state action should have the primary effect of restricting religious practice.
- The state should not express any religious beliefs, or in any publication, speech, or other implement of state power such as currency, sworn testimony, oath of fealty to the state, or endorsements of national pride. The state should not imply any derivation of authority from any religious authority, nor should it express temporal supremacy in relation to religious belief or practice.
- Political leaders should not express religious preferences in the course of their duties.
- No religion or denomination should have the power to prescribe, proscribe, or amend civil or common law.

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# The genocidal WAR on Condoms in Africa



*1.5 million deaths a year  
12 million orphans*

# THE CHURCH HAS DECLARED **War on Condoms**

“Opposition to condoms as a tool to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS is motivated primarily by conservative religious ideas, often disguised with pseudo-science”, says NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood.

Of the estimated 40 million people worldwide infected with HIV, almost two-thirds are in sub-Saharan Africa. The health workers in these countries are in the front line of the fight against the epidemic. They need to be listened to, not archbishops, preachers and mullahs.

What is increasingly clear is that millions more will die, millions of children will be orphaned, a cycle of poverty will spiral out of control as societies break down, families lose breadwinners, and the economy is unable to sustain the poor and the sick, that is if the HIV/AIDS pandemic is not brought under control.

The single most effective means of stopping the spread of HIV infections is the condom. According to UNAIDS, the condom is “the most efficient and available technology to reduce the sexual transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.” It is has played “a decisive role” in combatting the spread of AIDS.

And no sane person could doubt it. No person of goodwill, unblinkered by religious dogma, could fail to understand this fact.

But tragically – and a tragedy it is, for we must constantly remind ourselves of the unfolding human tragedy that the preventable AIDS epidemic leaves in its path – powerful

religious forces are lined up against science, against reason, and against the experience of all agencies working in the field.

In its defense, the Church makes the point that HIV/Aids is spread primarily by having unprotected, non-monogamous sexual relations and that since the Catholic Church certainly does not encourage such behaviour, it cannot be blamed for contributing to the spread of the epidemic. But this is sophistry. It's like saying reckless driving causes automobile accidents. While true, this doesn't mean one ought to campaign against seat belts or crash helmets, or campaign – unrealistically - for people to stay home and never travel.

Religious groups know this, so to cover the fact that they are really motivated by logic-defying religious doctrine, they attempt to frame their arguments using fake science. To make matters worse, they lie about real science. This action moves beyond irresponsible. It is criminal.

Could any lie be more pernicious – more murderous – than this one: In 2003, the president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Family, Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo claimed that the Aids virus is roughly 450 times smaller than the spermatozoon – a sperm cell - and thus can easily pass through the 'net' that is formed by the condom.

Over four continents the Catholic Church spread this lie, in spite of clear scientific and empirical evidence to the contrary!

**The lives of millions are at stake if this absurd dogma-driven nonsense isn't challenged.**

## ***Is it only the Catholic Church?***

No. It is now increasingly clear that the other religion with widespread influence in the most affected areas of the world is becoming increasingly vocal on the issue too. The Vatican has been joined by Islamic leaders in condemning condom use. For example, in Kenya, a Muslim leader stated:

“A lot of money is being wasted to poison our community ... a huge amount of money is spent on buying condoms, buying immorality.”

In Malaysia, Muslim clerics have strongly criticized a government plan to distribute condoms, saying that it would encourage extramarital sex and that it violated Islamic law. Chillingly, some Islamic countries – in particular – criminalise those infected with HIV.

## ***Did you know?***

It is estimated that at the beginning of 2008, at least 22 million adults and children are living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. That's over half the number of global infections. During the previous year, it is believed that around 1.5 million Africans died from AIDS. But an even bigger tragedy looms. The AIDS epidemic has left behind almost 12 million orphaned children. In some countries like Botswana, up to a quarter of the population is believed to be infected with the HIV virus. One in ten victims is a child under the age of 15.

The World Health Organisation says that the use of condoms can reduce the infection rate by as much as 90%, but the Catholic Church insists that they only encourage “the sort of behaviour” that causes AIDS.

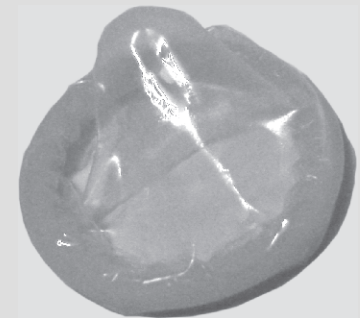
## ***Human Rights: The Hidden Victim***

**“Due to gender norms and inequalities, young girls and women are regularly and repeatedly denied information about, and access to, condoms, and often they do not have the power to negotiate the use of condoms,” says Peter Piot, director UNAIDS, 2006.**

This observation by UNAIDS researchers was emphasised in a speech by its director, Peter Piot in December 2006. Piot stated that drivers of the epidemic were “especially gender inequality, stigma and discrimination, deprivation and the failure to protect and realise human rights”.

In the most 'at-risk' societies, it is undeniable that these “gender norms and inequalities” are enforced and perpetuated by conservative religious leaders.

The same conservative religious forces that undermine efforts to educate at-risk groups about condoms are often the same that excuse, enforce and perpetuate other abuses of human rights - particularly with regards to women and sexual minorities. And it is these human rights deficiencies that UNAIDS director Peter Piot identifies as a prime driver in the spread of HIV/AIDS.



# **AN AVOIDABLE GENOCIDE**