

# **Vatican deplores Belgian parliament's criticism of pope on condoms**

VATICAN CITY - The Vatican has deplored a Belgian parliamentary resolution that criticized Pope Benedict XVI for his remarks about condoms and AIDS prevention.

In an April 17 statement, the Vatican's Secretariat of State said it "deplores the fact that a parliamentary assembly should have thought it appropriate to criticize the Holy Father on the basis of an isolated extract from an interview, separated from its context and used by some groups with a clear intent to intimidate."

The statement said it appeared that those groups were hoping "to dissuade the pope from expressing himself on certain themes of obvious moral relevance and from teaching the church's doctrine."

The Belgian parliament voted overwhelmingly April 2 to have the government relay to the Vatican the parliamentarians' disapproval of Pope Benedict's statement March 17 that distributing condoms was not the key to preventing AIDS.

The Belgian ambassador to the Holy See, Frank E. de Coninck, met April 15 at the Vatican with Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for relations with states, to formally inform the Vatican of the resolution.

The Secretariat of State said that it "notes with regret this action, unusual in the context of the diplomatic relations existing between the Holy See and the kingdom of Belgium."

The pope was asked about condoms in AIDS prevention by reporters aboard his flight to Cameroon March 17. After highlighting the church's efforts to help AIDS victims, the pope said: "One cannot overcome the problem with the distribution of condoms. On the contrary, they increase the problem."

The pope went on to explain that true prevention requires a change in sexual

behavior and a real effort to befriend and care for those living with AIDS.

In its statement April 17, the Secretariat of State said the pope “also emphasized the commitment of the church in both these areas. Without this moral and educational dimension, the battle against AIDS will not be won.”

“While in some European countries an unprecedented media campaign was unleashed concerning the predominant, not to say exclusive, value of prophylactics in the fight against AIDS, it is consoling to note that the moral considerations articulated by the Holy Father were understood and appreciated, in particular by the Africans and true friends of Africa, as well as by some members of the scientific community,” the statement said.

In the midst of the debate about the pope’s comments on condoms, Vatican officials and the Vatican newspaper cited several studies by researchers and by international agencies, including the World Health Organization, showing that the most effective anti-AIDS campaigns in Africa have been based on efforts to promote abstinence and fidelity in sexual relations.

Edward C. Green, director of the AIDS Prevention Research Project at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, told National Review Online March 25 that “the best evidence we have supports the pope’s comments.”

Green said when an individual uses a condom thinking it will reduce the risk of exposure to HIV that person may also take part in riskier behavior and take greater chances than one would take without condoms, for example, by having multiple and concurrent sexual partners.