

OPINION



CONTRACEPTION AND THE ART OF MOTOR CAR INSURANCE

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Our vision is to see a society where every individual enjoys full sexual and reproductive health, without fear of HIV/AIDS and the consequences of unwanted pregnancies. There are five main strategies to pursue:

1. Access to a wider range of reproductive health services and information;
2. Adolescents, not only the widest segment of our population, but those who should be first in line to receive information and education about their sexuality and their protection;
3. AIDS, which is ravaging the continent: 70% of global HIV cases occur in Africa;
4. Abortion – there are too many women who are dying from complications following unsafe terminations, around 300,000 every year in Africa, which is unacceptable, and the largest base of maternal mortality in the world;
5. Advocacy – because it is essential to build an alliance for the voices of those who need protection to be heard, sexual health policy needs to be articulated and built into the development agenda.

The sale of contraceptives is also critical. There are some parts of Africa where the use of condoms is less than one per cent, and access to them is severely constricted. It is not an issue of total population growth, though that has to be taken into consideration; it is an issue of individuals having the freedom to choose the timing and the spacing of their children. When women have children too early, or too late, or too close to one another, various problems arise. Their health is exposed to risk, and they do not have time for education. This feeds into the problem of early marriages, when their bodies are not ready, and they end up not attending school.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic must be combated with these things in mind. Over 80% of HIV spreads through sexual transmission, therefore the need for sexual education is imperative, ensuring that the sexually active members of the population are aware of the risks of HIV/AIDS. This means, in part, that condoms need to be made available. There is the issue of morality; some say that freeing up access to contraceptives is a call to much looser sexual patterns. This is the wrong way to see the problem. Condoms are an insurance precaution, not a call to promiscu-

ity. I insure my car against accidents, not because I wish to drive recklessly and drive into a wall. I insure my car against risk, and contraceptives fall into this category. You would never say to someone, "Don't insure your car, just drive carefully". This would be irresponsible behaviour. The world is not what you want it to be – you have to deal with the reality.

The moral objections are similarly raised with abortion – but we are neither for nor against abortion. We are merely dealing with the reality that hundreds of thousands of women are dying in Africa every year because

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of unsafe abortion. Somebody needs to draw up a proper strategy to deal with it, rather than pretend it's not happening. If everyone were a saint, there would be no need for sexual education; we would be naturally good. The death toll from HIV/AIDS and abortion must be faced head on. How many street children and orphans have we taken care of? Why are we asking that more should come? Only three countries in Africa have legalised abortion – Tunisia, South Africa and Cape Verde.

We have lost so much money from the United States. The US administration has asked that if we receive any funds, their use must be restricted – no talking about terminations, no referring anyone to a clinic that practises abortion. We want to show that this is a health hazard. It is completely legal. We are not asking our affiliates to break the law. In the 1960s and '70s, the US government put a great deal of money into health planning. Now this has collapsed, and the administration attaches its ideological prejudice to the funding. Why should abortion be legal in the US, but not in Africa? Why should one be allowed to discuss abortion in the US, but not in Africa? There is a certain amount of intolerable hypocrisy going on. The US is a champion of free speech, but when we wish to discuss these issues, we are requested to be silent. We deserve the freedom and the choice that any American is entitled to. ●