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Lobby group hits out at bishops over advert stance

By NATION REPORTER

A lobby group has accused the Catholic Church in Kenya of putting lives at risk by rejecting the use of condoms.

Catholics for Change president Jon O'Brien said some Catholics had accepted that condoms can be used, and must be used in some cases, but Kenyan bishops "reject all this wisdom".

"Even Pope Benedict said that 'where the intention is to reduce the risk of infection' condoms can be 'a first step in a movement toward a different way, a more human way, of living sexuality,'" he said in a statement Wednesday.

This came a day after the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops distanced itself from advertisements by the group promoting the use of condoms and reaffirmed its stand against them.

Chairman John Cardinal Njue on Tuesday said those behind the Catholics for Choice advertisements were not Catholics and advised the faithful to disregard the messages.

The Cardinal (above) reiterated that the stand of the universal Catholic Church on condom use had not changed and that they were "pro-life and not pro-choice".

However, Mr O'Brien maintained that they belonged to the church and urged the Kenyan faithful to learn from Catholics elsewhere.

"Catholics around the world embrace the belief that using a condom to protect ourselves and our loved ones is profoundly pro-life — because it saves lives when we prevent HIV and Aids. Majority of Catholics polled in Ghana, Ireland, Mexico, the Philippines and the US agree," the statement read.

According to Mr O'Brien, these Catholics are encouraged to use condoms where they're needed for HIV prevention.

"We, and many millions of Kenyans, are Catholic by our baptism. We are Catholic by our fidelity to the foundational teachings of our faith, among which is the indisputable primacy of the conscience in moral decision-making," he said.

Further, Mr O'Brien called on the members of the church to decide for themselves on the matter, saying, the "church is not limited to the bishops."

“The church is the people of God, we who are baptised believers and clergy together. We have a right, and indeed, a duty to speak up about matters that affect our lives. In the Condoms4Life campaign, we have, our message is: Good Catholics use condoms,” Mr O’Brien said.