

# HIV-infected condoms sent to kill Africans, claims archbishop

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Mozambique's Roman Catholic archbishop has accused European condom manufacturers of deliberately infecting their products with HIV "in order to finish quickly the African people".

The archbishop of Maputo, Francisco Chimoio, told the BBC that he had specific information about a plot to kill off Africans. "I know that there are two countries in Europe ... making condoms with the virus, on purpose," he alleged. But he refused to name the countries.

He added: "They want to finish with the African people. This is the programme. They want to colonise until up to now. If we are not careful we will finish in one century's time."

His views have prompted outrage from activists trying to combat Aids and help sufferers. They described the statements as ridiculous. Medical specialists said it was impossible for the Aids virus to live inside condoms for any length of time.

Marcella Mahanjane, a prominent Mozambican activist, told the BBC that there was no evidence to back the archbishop's claims. "We've been using condoms for years now, and we still find them safe," she said.

Nonetheless the archbishop's comments are likely to undermine the Mozambique government's campaign to educate people about the disease in a country where about one in six of the 19 million citizens are HIV-positive and about 500 people are infected each day.

Health specialists say that views contrary to scientific orthodoxy on Aids are frequently seized upon by people looking for a reason not to use condoms or by those reluctant to take the antiretroviral drugs, the main treatment for HIV infection.

The archbishop is widely respected in Mozambique, in part because of the leading role he played in brokering a peace deal to end a 16-year civil war in 1992.

The Catholic church has resisted pressure to amend its opposition to the use of condoms despite the Aids pandemic. Archbishop Chimoio told the BBC that abstinence was the best way to fight HIV/Aids.

"If we want to change the situation to face HIV/Aids it's necessary to have a new mentality. If we don't change [that] mentality we'll be finished quickly," he said. "It means marriage, people being faithful to their wives ... [and] young people must be abstaining from sexual relations."

The archbishop's comments echo the scepticism over Aids found among leaders in other parts of Africa, notably neighbouring South Africa where the president, Thabo Mbeki, has questioned the link between HIV and Aids and suggested that antiretroviral drugs are so poisonous they are more dangerous than the disease.

Aids education has been undermined in other parts of the continent by leaders who back cures that show no signs of overcoming HIV. Gambia's president, Yahya Jammeh, claims to be able to cure the disease by rubbing a green herbal potion into people's bodies. Patients have been referred to the president by the country's health ministry. A UN Aids official who criticised Mr Jammeh's claims was expelled from Gambia.