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## **Sacrificing Humans to the Condom Gods**

by Douglas A. Sylva

Is it flippant to wonder if the major international AIDS institutions, the United Nations and its many allied nongovernmental organizations, actually worship the condom? After all, they are willing to make sacrifices – human sacrifices – in the name of the condom. Right now, these groups are in the process of sacrificing the people of Uganda.

Uganda must be sacrificed because its AIDS rate is too low, and it is low because the government of Uganda decided almost from the beginning of the epidemic to seek to convince the general population to change its behaviors. School children were told to abstain and to delay sexual initiation. Married couples were told to remain faithful to one another. The school children listened; the couples listened, and Uganda escaped the epidemic that has devastated every other country in its region.

But this success through a veritable sexual counter-revolution could never be acceptable to the liberal and sexually liberated members of the international AIDS establishment, who needed to prove that the new norms of sexual promiscuity were not to blame for the explosion of sexually transmitted diseases, culminating in the AIDS epidemic, and that sexual promiscuity could even be made "safe" through a tiny piece of latex.

And so they have engaged in a massive campaign of misinformation that is now being advanced by sympathetic or ignorant media outlets almost every day of the week. They must turn reality on its head to make their case.

Propaganda: Condoms were responsible for the success in Uganda, and cases of AIDS may now increase because the Bush administration has begun to replace condoms with abstinence-only training. According to a August 30th story in the Guardian newspaper, "Stephen Lewis, the UN secretary general's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, said US cuts in funding for condoms and an emphasis on promoting abstinence had contributed to a shortage of condoms in Uganda, one of the few African countries which has succeeded in reducing its AIDS rates. 'There is no doubt in my mind that the condom crisis in Uganda is being driven by [US policies],' Mr. Lewis said yesterday. 'To impose a dogma-driven policy that is fundamentally flawed is doing damage to Africa.'" According to Reuters, Lewis claimed that Bush's "distortion of the preventive apparatus . . . is resulting in great damage and undoubtedly will cause significant numbers of infections which should never have occurred."

Reality: Abstinence and fidelity were responsible for the success in Uganda, and AIDS may now increase because Western institutions have insisted that condoms replace abstinence and fidelity training. According to Dr. Edward Green, a Harvard medical professor and an expert on Uganda, "Abstinence and fidelity objectives and indicators have been almost completely removed from Uganda's current national AIDS strategy (which were central to earlier strategies), apparently to appease the wazungu (foreign AIDS advisors)." And so there is the possibility that the West could use condoms to raise AIDS rates while at the same time blaming abstinence, in order to make the case for even more condoms.

Propaganda: It is more important to liberate Ugandan women from conventional marriage than it is to liberate Ugandan women from prostitution, since marriage is an enormous threat to women. According to Lewis, "As more and more research is done on the particular vulnerability of women to infection, we're learning more about the situations in which risk is paramount. And extraordinarily enough, according to UNAIDS, the risk is particularly high in apparently monogamous marriages and partnerships. Ironically, and lethally, in the age of AIDS in Africa, marriage can be dangerous to women's health. . . . There is virtually no defense against that

reality: the power imbalance in marriage is too great to permit or to request the regular use of condoms. Thus it is that the classic 'ABC' intervention [Abstain, Be faithful, or use Condoms as a last resort] doesn't work in the one place where the risk for the woman may be greatest....A way must be found to allow the woman to protect herself, independent of male hegemony."

Reality: It is difficult to know whether this statement is simply chauvinist (men cannot remain faithful and do not care if they infect their wives), or chauvinist and racist (black men cannot remain faithful and do not care if they infect their wives). But the idea that married women are more vulnerable than prostitutes because some married men are promiscuous – when all men who frequent prostitutes are by definition promiscuous – is ridiculous.

Propaganda: The Christian beliefs of George W. Bush and the Ugandan first lady are guiding them to replace sound public health policy – again focused almost exclusively on the condom – with "abstinence only" religious doctrine. According to the Guardian, "Campaigners accuse Uganda's first lady, Janet Museveni, of being instrumental in the switch towards a policy of abstinence. Ugandan government officials say that her religious beliefs, stemming from being a born-again Christian, are central to her promotion of the message of abstinence."

Reality: It was traditional religious beliefs that guided the Ugandan government and its people to reduce sexual promiscuity so successfully in the late 1980s and 1990s.

In this perverse quest to prop up the condom, all things tied to self-control – the only sure way to avoid the sexual transmission of AIDS – are blamed for a disease spread primarily through a lack of self-control. Green is preparing for the worst: "I personally have been fearing an increase in national prevalence for a couple of years . . . If Uganda's AIDS program looks increasingly like that of any other African country (condoms, testing, pills), it would follow that Uganda would begin to have results like other African countries. . . . After a decade of unprecedented HIV prevalence decline, casual sex and HIV prevalence may now be on the rise. From what we have seen already, 'experts' are probably preparing to blame this on Uganda moving to 'abstinence only.'"

But is it possible that not everyone in the mainstream media has accepted this fiction? Last Tuesday, the same day that Reuters dutifully reported that, "US Abstinence Drive Hurts AIDS Fight – UN Official," the news service ran another story with the headline, "Topless Virgins Vie for King in AIDS-hit Swaziland." Apparently, "More than 50,000 bare-breasted virgins vied to become the King of Swaziland's 13th wife on Monday in a ceremony which critics say ill befits a country with the world's highest HIV/AIDS rate. King Mswati III, sub-Saharan Africa's last absolute monarch, arrived dressed in a leopard-skin loincloth to watch the Reed Dance ceremony, which he has used since 1999 to pluck new brides from the girls dressed in little more than beaded mini-skirts. . . . Critics say [King] Mswati, who has courted controversy for his lavish lifestyle . . . sets a bad example by encouraging polygamy and teenage sex in a country where 40 percent of adults live with HIV."

Were we supposed to compare the two articles, and notice that the UN and its friends can condemn Bush (who has pledged \$15 billion to fight AIDS), Christianity, abstinence and fidelity in one article, while no Western critics could be found for the bizarre ritual of promiscuity in the other article? Were we supposed to notice that people like Lewis are fixated on Uganda, where the AIDS infection rate is 6 percent, instead of places like Swaziland, where the entire society may come crumbling down?