



## LIFE

## A REVOLUTION, OR AN EVOLUTION? POPE FRANCIS OK'S THE USE OF CONTRACEPTIVES

At a press conference aboard the papal plane, Pope Francis suggested that it is okay for women to use contraceptives in a bid to curb the spread of the Zika virus. He said this while strongly rejecting abortion as a method of slowing the spread of the Zika virus in south and central America, where hundreds of children are being born with microcephaly, a defect where a baby is born with a smaller cranium resulting in mental disability, paralysis and a lower life expectancy.

As the virus sweeps through Latin America, a state of emergency has been declared in some countries, like Brazil, where women have been advised not to get pregnant for at least the next two years, a very unrealistic situation. Latin America is predominantly Roman Catholic with highly restrictive laws against abortion.

The Catholic Church has a long history of definitive teachings against abortion and contraception and so the women of Latin America are left with no choice; no contraceptives to prevent getting pregnant and no abortion to remove unwanted pregnancies. However, the Pope's recent statement suggests a ray of hope for these women.

He called abortion an absolute evil, "It is to kill someone in order to save another. This is what the Mafia does," the Pope said regarding abortion. "On the other hand, avoiding pregnancy is not an absolute evil." To back up his stance, the pope cited a decision made by Pope Paul VI in the 60s to allow nuns in the Belgian Congo take contraceptives to avoid pregnancy due to rape. According to him, taking contraceptives under such circumstances "is not an absolute evil."

"Let's not confuse the evil of 'simply' avoiding a pregnancy with abortion," Francis said. "Abortion is not a theological problem, it's a human, medical problem...a person is murdered to save another one, in the best of cases. In others, just to have fun."

While the pope completely ruled out abortion for already pregnant women in Zika affected countries, it appears he has given room for the use of contraceptives as an option to manage the situation. The statement of the Pope is bound to stir a lot of controversy; church conservatives will see this as a betrayal as it goes against the fundamental belief and teachings of the Catholic Church on birth control.

Catholic catechism states that, aside from natural family planning, where women monitor their body to avoid having sex with their partners at fertile periods, anything that works to deliberately violate God's design of procreation is intrinsically evil. This stance is

basically founded on what is deemed the “natural law”, where, according to Catholic catechism, the purpose of sex is procreation and not pleasure.

The World Health Organization already called for access to emergency contraception and counselling for women in south and central America who have had unprotected sex and would like to prevent conception due to concerns of the Zika virus. A Dutch NGO, [Women on Web](#), is also [offering free abortion](#) consultations to women infected with the virus.

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Hadassah Egbedi  
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