



OCEANIA/PAPUA NEW GUINEA - Sex education with condom, Catholic schools express "conscientious objection"

Rabaul (Agenzia Fides) - In the Catholic schools in Papua New Guinea sex education will not be carried out by encouraging condom use and the distribution of condoms to students will not be done, despite the decisions of the state: it is the decision of the Episcopal Conference which, as reported to Fides, has announced a "conscientious objection" to the disposal of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry has ordered that condoms to students should be distributed in secondary schools. The measure is part of a new policy aimed at combating AIDS and HIV and provides a path of sex education for schoolchildren.

After a recent meeting, the Bishops argue: "Even if the document issued by the Ministry of Education has many positive points, we cannot be forced to follow a policy – that concerning the use of condoms, ed - which contrasts with our philosophy of education" says to Fides Mgr. Francesco Panfilo, Archbishop of Rabaul and vice president of the Episcopal Commission for Catholic Education. Mgr. Panfilo says that the Church is also ready to respond in court, if the state were to challenge this decision, legally.

The Catholic Church – explains the Archbishop to Fides - considers the distribution of condoms as a wrong signal to students: it encourages them to further attitudes of sexual freedom before and outside marriage, which can be advocates of HIV. "If a school gives a ballpoint pen and a book to a student, the basic message is simple: to study. But if you give condoms, the message for students will be: go and feel free to do what you want ", it is an invitation to irresponsibility, explains to Fides James Ume, principal at a secondary school named after De La Salle.

According to the Ministry of Education, however, there is no way to fully control the sexual behavior of students. Since a high rate of infection with HIV-AIDS in recent years, was recorded in the school population, condom use, according to the Department, is useful to limit the damage and infections.

The Catholic Church also emphasizes how a course of sex education and fight against AIDS for students should be the prerogative of the Councils of the Institute and must take into account the joint contribution of teachers and students' parents. The policy, says Fr. Paul Jennings, of St. Joseph International College in Boroko, "should do more to maintain a partnership with parents" and not impose directives in the education of their children. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 09/05/2012)